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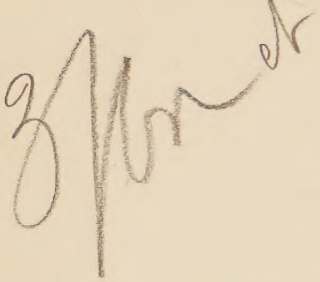

THOUGHTS

ON

BELIEF AND LIFE:

Sermons

BY

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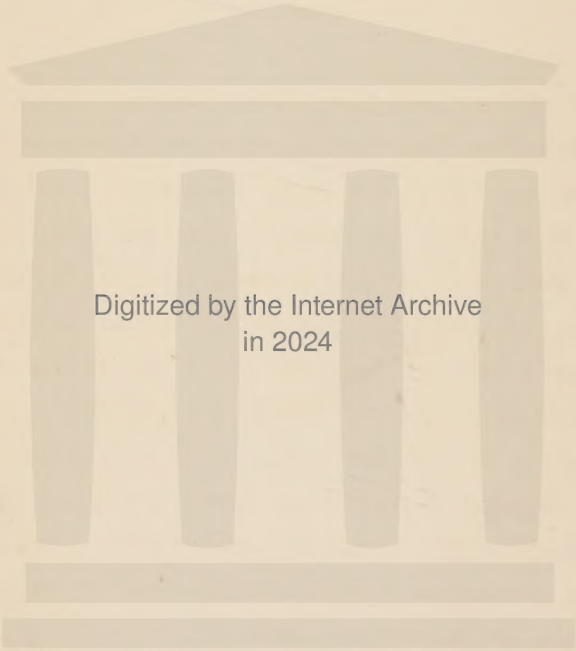
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PREFACE.

SOME of those who have heard Sermons included in this volume have told me that they have proved helpful to them, and have expressed a desire that they should be printed. For this reason I have thought it right to comply with the request of the publisher that they should appear in their present form. I have to thank the Editor of *The Church of Ireland Gazette* for permitting me to reprint one of the series; and my gratitude must also be expressed to those who aided me in selecting the discourses now printed from a larger number, or who read them over for me as they passed through the press.

H. J. L.

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SERMONS.

I.

THE COMING OF THE LORD.*

"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."—ST. JAMES v. 8.

I SUPPOSE all of us will allow—sorrowfully allow—that the Holy Scriptures are far from having for us the freshness which they must have had for Christians in the first ages of the Church. We read them; we believe them to have been inspired by God the Holy Spirit; but we find it hard to realize that they convey a living message for ourselves.

And, without doubt, the reasons for this loss of force in the teachings of the written Word are many. Our very familiarity with the text of the Bible is one of them. It is impossible, when phrases have been on our lips, and on the lips of those about us, from our childhood; when they have become part of our ordinary speech; when they have, as it were, gone to form the very atmosphere which we breathe—that the thoughts which they enshrine should not lose some of their vividness; that they should not become less striking as they become less novel.

* St. Ann's Church, Dublin, First Sunday in Advent, 1899.

But there is another cause, and a deeper one, for the comparative failure of the Scriptures to inspire in us a real interest. The greater part of the literature which we call the Bible was called forth by, and has relation to, the special circumstances of those to whom it was in the first instance addressed. Scripture, it is true, contains a revelation for all time. It has lessons for the men of every nation and of every age. But it is no less true that its writers had in view the needs of no age but their own. Take, for instance, the New Testament, apart from the Gospels. The greater part of it is a collection of letters, addressed to Churches or to individual Christians. Why were they written? Because occasions arose on which certain persons and certain communities needed advice, or reproof, or exhortation. Their teaching is still profitable in these later days. But it cannot help us as it should, since we cannot really understand it, unless we know something of those to whom it was given, unless we comprehend their difficulties in faith or in practice, their beliefs and modes of thought, unless, in a word, as we read, we can put ourselves in their place. It is the function of scholarship and learning to put us in possession of the facts which may enable us in some degree to do this. But when all is done that the most profound learning can do, it carries us, after all, only a very little way. Many circumstances must remain altogether unknown. In not a few cases we are driven to guesswork and conjecture. And even if scholarship could do all that it seeks to do, it would still fail in its real aim. Knowledge gained by labour and pains is never the same as

knowledge acquired by daily and hourly experience. We may understand the language of a St. Paul if we thoroughly learn the thoughts and the surroundings of those to whom he wrote; but his language can never appeal to us with the same power as if those thoughts and those surroundings were our own.

And, after all, in the nature of things, the results of learned investigation must be to most of us a sealed book. We must content ourselves at the best with a smattering. We may cull a fact here and there, and that is all. The real drift, the real power, of the Divine message must in many cases lie beyond our reach.

Nevertheless, there are some things which may be known by all; and these, if they are used and thought about, will throw light upon many a dark and obscure page of the Apostolic writings. I wish to direct your attention this evening to one of them. It will not be amiss if, on this First Sunday in Advent, we try to realize how utterly different in many respects were the thoughts of Christians in Apostolic days about the Second Coming of the Lord, from those which commonly prevail among ourselves.

In the first place, the coming of Christ was to them something which might be expected to take place in the near future. Most, if not all, of them thought that before their own generation had passed away Christ would have returned, and would again take His place among His people. We know, of course, that in this belief the early Church was mistaken. Eighteen centuries have passed away, and our Lord has not yet appeared. His Advent seems as far away

as ever. But, mistaken as the belief was, it was a very real one. It died hard. And as the years passed by, and brought its refutation with them, Christian men were sorely perplexed. They had lived in this hope of the speedy return of their Lord; it had become for them almost an article of the Faith; they had grounded it upon His own words; and now His promise seemed to fail them. The scoffers among whom they lived had their momentary triumph. "Where is the promise of His coming?" they cried; "for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."* And what answer could the Christians give? Had they not boasted that the day was at hand when the kingdom of the world would become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ;† when the faith of the Gospel should be once and for ever vindicated against all opposers? The Apostle could only remind them that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.‡ To them it might seem that the promise was delayed; but with God, in spite of all seeming, there is no delay.

The early Christians, then, expected the Second Advent in the near future. But it was not only thus that their view of it differed from ours. They looked forward to it as an event of joy and gladness. Have we not in very truth almost forgotten to associate happiness with the coming of the Christ? If we have not come to regard it as something so remote that it scarcely needs to be thought of at all, do we not conceive of it mainly as a day of wrath? The

* 2 Pet. iii. 4. † Rev. xi. 15 (R.V.). ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 8.

mention of it brings to our minds the judgment-seat—the opening of the Books—the terrors of an awakened conscience—the awful disclosure of secret and forgotten sins—the fearful sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed."* We anticipate the coming of Christ, not with joy and hope, but with dread and dismay.

It was far otherwise with the men to whom St. Paul, St. James, and St. Peter wrote. It is impossible for us to give a real meaning to their statements, unless we remember that with them the one thought which overpowered all others in the contemplation of the return of Christ was the *joy* of the reunion of the Church with her Lord. Take, for instance, that grand passage from the first Epistle to the Thessalonians,† which it is the glory of our Irish Church to have restored to its true place as a lesson in the Burial Service. The Thessalonians looked for the Day of the Lord as near at hand; but already the delay in its approach had caused them sorrow. As month after month passed away, death was working among them. One after another those whom they loved were being taken. As they laid them in the tomb, they knew, indeed, that they were but asleep—asleep in Jesus; and in that knowledge the cruel sting of death had lost its power. But, alas! what deep sorrow yet remained! Were those dear ones still to be asleep when the Lord returned? Were they to be shut out from the unspeakable gladness of the meeting of Christ with His people? Was the joy of that day only for those who should be alive when it came? Might they, too, any day be

* Matt. xxv. 41. † 1 Thess. iv. 13-18.

deprived of it by death? No, cries the Apostle; the joy shall be theirs as well as ours; we shall have no advantage over them. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the *dead* in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The Advent would be a time of unutterable joy, in which quick and dead alike would have their part.

And, once again, this coming of the Lord, to which men looked forward with such joyful hope, was to be no isolated event, unconnected with all that went before. The view on this matter, expressed and implied in our Prayer Book, is but the echo of the view of the Apostolic Church. As the season of Advent, rich in thoughts of the final appearance of Christ, is the fitting prelude to Christmas, when we commemorate His lowly birth; as our Advent and Christmas Collects alike link together the coming in great humility, and the coming in glorious majesty, so did men of old unite the Nativity with the Triumphal Return in the great Advent truth of the Incarnation. The Second Coming is the counterpart and the complement of the First. That which was begun in the stall at Bethlehem will be completed when Christ at length establishes the throne of His glory, and reigns in

bodily presence over His Church. For how much still remained to be accomplished! How fervently the children of the kingdom still needed to pray that the kingdom might come! The kingdom of Christ! Was not it the kingdom in which mercy and truth should meet together—in which righteousness and peace should kiss each other?* It was a kingdom of peace; and yet men fought and made war. It was a kingdom of righteousness and mercy; yet still the wicked oppressed the good—still wrong and robbery prevailed. But the Lord would come. Then the kingdom which by His First Coming He had inaugurated, would be completed and made perfect. Then all irregularities would be redressed; then both good and bad would receive their due reward; then, at last, mercy and truth would meet together, righteousness and peace would kiss each other.

These three characteristic traits, which I have tried to indicate of the way in which it was habitual for the early Christians to regard the Second Advent, illustrate our text, "Be ye patient: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Did you ever hear a preacher, in speaking of the appearance of Christ at the end of the world, exhort his congregation to patience? If such an exhortation is ever made, it must surely strike us as somewhat unreal. Patience is a virtue which, in this connexion, we have no difficulty in putting into practice. It is rather difficult *not* to be patient in the anticipation of an event of which we have no very vivid expectation, which scarcely enters into our thoughts, which at

* Ps. lxxxv. 10.

least we half unconsciously assume to be a long way off. But St. James, and those to whom he wrote, were men of quite a different temper. They believed the day of Christ to be imminent. They were suffering under evils which, in the light of that day, would disappear. No wonder if they became impatient, restless, fretful at the delay; no wonder if they looked for and hasted overmuch unto the coming of the Lord. And so they are reminded that they must be patient.

But more. They looked forward to the coming of Christ as to a time of joy, when grievances should be redressed. The very examples of patience which are mentioned in the chapter from which our text is taken prove it. "Take the prophets for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord."* Surely Job was patient—Job, who would not deny God, no matter what happened. Deprived of property, bereaved of children, visited with disease, mocked by false comforters, still he was faithful. Whence, then, his afflictions? They served "the end of the Lord." One trouble after another strengthened character, deepened faith, made him ready for the brighter time that was to follow. So it was with the Christians to whom St. James wrote. The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them; the chastisement of the Lord seemed grievous; but it would not endure for ever. The coming of the Lord was nigh, at which all wrongs should be set right; when sorrow and sighing should flee away.† Let

* St. James v. 10, 11. † Isaiah xxxv. 10.

them, then, be patient, as Job was patient, and, like Job, they will soon see the night of affliction melt away before the dawn of the glorious day of joy and peace.

And what were the afflictions under which they suffered? Mainly the suffering which deep poverty always brings in its train. The Church to which this epistle came was a poor Church. The fact has its witness in almost every paragraph of the letter. Perhaps nowhere is it more clearly evident than in the picture in the second chapter—so vivid, and yet so artlessly drawn—of one of their meetings for worship. They were almost all poor. And yet, like the poor in all ages, they were apt to fawn upon the rich. Sunday by Sunday, as they came together, none of the great ones of the earth were among them. At length, one day a stranger appears. His gay clothing and gold ring mark him as a man of wealth. There is a flutter in the little congregation. At once he is shown to the best seat. Another, in vile raiment, had entered with him. He is unobserved. If there is no seat for him, he can stand. At the best, he may sit at the rich man's feet.

But with all their cringing respect for wealth, other thoughts had place in their hearts; for they knew right well what the rich were. They saw, with bitterness of spirit, the ever-growing piles of money, for they knew that they were built up by greedy men, who oppressed them. It needed not that St. James should write the words; they but expressed the sentiments of their own hearts: "Behold,

the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth."* It was *their* hire that was kept back; *their* cries had been heard by the Lord of hosts; how should they not harbour bitter thoughts against the rich? They were the victims of their cruelty, their oppression, their greed.

And what should mend or end it all? They had no hope but the day of the Lord; and in that day all would be set right. "Go to now, ye rich," writes St. James, "weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure *in the last days*."† And he adds, to those who were the victims of their rapacity: "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." "Be patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."‡

Brethren, the Epistle of St. James is the most old-world of the New Testament Books; but, in spite of this, in no other Book are some of the characteristic features of our modern life more vividly reflected. It is thus that its lessons are permanent—that it teaches us still. Has there ever been an age when the contrast between the rich and the poor, which forms the very groundwork of the Epistle, was more emphatic than in our own? This

* St. James v. 4. † St. James v. 1-3 (R.V.). ‡ *Vv.* 7, 8.

is a time when wealth of extraordinary vastness is gathered. It is a time when greed is more than ordinarily selfish; when the faces of the poor are ground by the rich—an age of sweating; of proud and heartless capitalism—an age in which the aim of most men is money, and when the conventions of business by which money is made are often widely different from the laws of God. What is the Advent lesson which the Epistle of St. James brings us? Is it not this? "Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The day which shall bring joy and peace to those that serve the Lord, shall bring only terror and anguish for you. See, then, that if you are rich, your riches are not gotten by unrighteousness. Deal justly, love mercy; think of the miseries of the poor, by whose labour your wealth is won; walk humbly with your God; for that alone can bring you joy in the day of the Lord.

That is part of the message, but only part. For we must not assume that righteousness and poverty of necessity go hand in hand. If the rich are grasping, so, too often, are the poor. If the rich are dishonest, oppressive, unmerciful, cruel, so are the poor; if the rich keep back the hire of their labourers, the poor may keep back the good and honest work due to their employers—may spend in drink and selfish amusement the money which ought to be spent on wife and child. In the day of the Lord each shall receive his due reward. The greedy poor, as well as the greedy rich, shall be condemned. For both alike a portion of misery is reserved.

The day of the Lord draweth nigh, a day of joy—even though the joy of anticipation be sometimes mingled with fear—for rich and poor, if only the aim of life be the service of God, the good of men; a day of woe and lamentation for all, rich or poor, for whom selfish indulgence is the goal of effort.

II.

THE FULNESS OF THE TIME.*

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son."
GAL. iv. 4.

IT is a law of nature that everything happens in the fulness of the time. It is God's established way of working; and in that sense it would be almost true to say that nothing can happen otherwise. Translate this law into the language of science, and it becomes a statement of the great world-principle of evolution. The development of the race runs parallel to the growth of the individual. It is a long and slow process of development. Species, in the animal world, follows upon species—rather, is produced by species—just as the infant follows the embryo; just as youth follows childhood, as mature age follows youth. And the principle—one of the principles at least—upon which this gradual evolution of the various ranks in the animal kingdom, culminating in man, proceeds is what scientists call "the survival of the fittest." That individual survives, to become the parent of a new species of animal, which is suited to the circumstances in which it is placed. And

* Edinburgh Cathedral, First Sunday in Advent, 1897.

so species follows species, kind succeeds kind, as the circumstances change. Last of all, greatest of all, comes man, just when the world is ready to receive him. With him, as with all the rest, the law holds: the race comes into being when all things are prepared for it, when it is needed in God's plan; in other words, in the fulness of the time. If it be otherwise—if the individual or the race comes too soon, before the time is filled up—the only possible result is the fierce conflict, at awful odds, between him and his surroundings. It ends, it can only end, in defeat and extinction for that which is born out of due time.

This, or something like this, is, I think, what those from whom we must learn all that we can know of God's method of working in nature tell us as to the origin of species. We shall be more than foolish if we affirm that it is untrue, because it conflicts with some system of belief which we learnt in our childhood. And if it be true, what an immeasurably grand conception it gives us of God and His relation to the world which He has made, and which He sustains! Once and for ever, in the far away ages of eternity, the plan of the world's history was conceived in the Infinite Mind; the lines were laid down in which was to move the development of all living things—plants, animals, men. Slowly, surely, under the eye of God, by the power of His omnipotent will, and under the direction of His guiding hand, it is worked out, and approaches the final goal. No need to change or amend the plan, no need to help it on by miracle,

no need hastily, and in a moment, to create new species, entirely unlike all that went before. The development advances with slow and measured tread, everything coming when it should, all things in the fulness of the time, a testimony through all the ages to the infinite wisdom of God, with whom a thousand years are as one day.

As God works in natural things, so does He also work in things spiritual. There also there is the slow and steady advance, each epoch the necessary result of its forerunner; each revelation coming when its environment is ready for it, a never-ceasing progress; nothing sudden, nothing out of its place or out of its time; the gradual working out of a plan devised from the beginning.

It may not be unfitting at this Advent season, when our thoughts naturally centre round the Incarnation, to remind ourselves that the great law of evolution is exemplified in it also, the greatest event in the world's history: that it is indeed true, as St. Paul tells us, that, "in the fulness of time, God sent His Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the law." As St. Paul tells us—nay, rather, as Christ Himself tells us. "Think not," He says, "that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."* The development begins with the law of Moses; it is continued under the prophets; it reaches its consummation, its end, its fulfilment, in Christ, God manifest in the flesh.

Have you ever thought, brethren, why it is that

* Matt. v. 17.

we read the Old Testament Scriptures at all? Why has God placed them in our hands, and enjoined upon us the study of them? Why will it not suffice to fill our minds with the incomparably more precious teaching of the books of the New Testament—above all, with what is recorded for us in the Gospels themselves? Just for this reason, that the Old Testament gives us the story of the development of God's plan age after age; just because it tells us how God prepared an environment into which it was possible for Christ to come; just because without the Old Testament we could not understand that religion, like everything else in God's world, is an evolution.

You know the steps of that evolution as they are related there. It was the design of the Father from the beginning that there should be a universal religion, supplying the spiritual cravings of all men, raising them up, and making them partakers of His own nature. And this design was to be accomplished by the Son taking upon Him man's flesh, and being born as one of the sons of men. And so, first of all, God chose a family—a race—from whom the God-Man should spring. He chose the race of Abraham. They were an uncultured race, quite unfit, as yet, to be the heralds of the universal religion. They were low down in the spiritual and the moral order. They were no better, or little better, than the nations around them. They had a God, the Lord of the whole earth; but they knew Him not; to them He was but their tribal deity, fighting their battles, punishing their enemies, just as Chemosh was the god of the

Moabites, or Milcom the god of the Ammonites. They were always tempted to forsake Him for some rival divinity, who seemed for the moment more powerful. Of His holiness they could form no conception. Before all things, then, this race must be schooled in morals. And so the Law was given them. It was their schoolmaster, their moral tutor as St. Paul puts it, Christwards.* By it they had some of the moral and spiritual training which was needed by the nation of the Christ—the nation from which there should come a pure and holy religion to the whole earth.

When the Law had, in some measure, done its work, this nation had to pass through another stage of training. They must be taught that God was not the God of their race alone: that He is the God of the whole world, and of all peoples. They must be taught, too, that He is holy and very high exalted. They must learn new lessons of the infinity of His wisdom, of His power, of His goodness. To lead them to this higher level was the function of the prophets. But they did more than this. They spoke of the future of the people of God; they spoke, with ever-increasing distinctness, of One who was to be born of the seed of David, suffering and yet triumphant, lowly and yet a king; they inspired the hope which was to bind the people together; they taught them to look forward to the future for the glory of their race, and that that glory was to be centred in One whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting.† In a word, they foretold the

* Gal. iii. 24 (see R.V., and Lightfoot's note). † Micah v. 2.

coming of the Christ. And their words were not in vain. The promise of the Christ took firm hold upon the mind of the Jewish race. When centuries rolled by, and the time was almost come for the revelation of the Son of God to men, the hope had become an expectation which sought its realization not in far-off ages, but in the immediate future. When the forerunner preached in the wilderness of Judea, "all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ."* The hope might take a mistaken form, it might become debased, sensual; but still it was there. When the true claimant to the Messiahship appeared, those who were spiritual would recognise Him. It was certain that He would have a band of followers sufficient to found His Church, to publish His religion.

Raised, spiritualized, filled with the Messianic idea by the teaching of the prophets, the Jewish people were almost ready for the new revelation. Almost, but not quite. They had something still to learn. This new religion was not to be for them alone; it was to be catholic. They were to be but the heralds who should proclaim it to all nations. And how unfitted for this task were they even yet. Narrow, isolated, speaking but one language, with a religion now differing from that of all other races; behindhand in art, in philosophy, in civilization; their narrowness and exclusiveness encouraged by their whole past—how were they to be the bearers of God's universal message? They themselves must be made catholic if they were to teach the Catholic Faith.

* Luke iii. 15.

God had His own way of making them catholic. It was done by means of the dispersion. They were scattered all over the face of the earth. No nation existed which had not Jews living in their midst. And with what result to themselves? Many of them forgot their old language. They had their Greek Scriptures; they acquired Greek modes of thought; they learned philosophy and art and culture of all kinds; their sympathies were enlarged; they were able to discern goodness and truth elsewhere than in their own inherited teaching; they had within them the germs of catholicity.

So, through the lapse of centuries, God formed a people for His purpose, instructed in morals by the law, in the knowledge of God and the hope of the Christ by the prophets, in catholicity of spirit by the dispersion. And thus at length it was possible that He should through them reveal Himself in the Christ. And so, in the fulness of the time—was it not really so?—Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Son of God and Son of Man, the Mediator between God and the whole race of men, by Whom God "willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." *

I may speak to you for only a very few minutes longer. Let me, then, try to express but one further thought. I have attempted to show that the law of nature and of grace alike is the law of evolution; that the coming of Christ is the end of a long process of development. But let us remember that in nature there is in strict truth no such thing known to us as

* 1 Tim. ii. 4, 5 (R.V.).

the end of a development. God, in the course of ages, produces a species. It seems to us the goal; but it is not. That species is itself, or may be, but the starting-point of a fresh evolution, from which higher and higher forms result. And so, when we say that the Incarnation is the end of a development, let us remember what we mean. It is, in one sense, the end to which all things that went before led up; but it is also a beginning. What the end of this new development, in the midst of which we now are, will be, we in some measure know. We look for the appearing once again of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ;* we look for new heavens and a new earth;† we look for a kingdom wherein reigneth righteousness.

What are the stages of development through which the world and the Church must pass in preparation for this new revelation of God? It is idle for us to speculate. But one part of that development, that preparation, we do know. And God has left it to us to see that it takes place. One preparation for the coming of Christ is the preaching of the Gospel. Missions are the great work of the Church in making ready a way for the coming of Christ—missions at home as well as abroad; but, since home mission work is at least in some measure provided for, above all things foreign missions. And these we have most sadly neglected. Surely, then, it is well that, in the season of Advent at least, some larger place should be found in our thoughts, in our interests, in our prayers, for the work of the Church in foreign missions.

* Titus ii. 13 (R.V.). † 2 Pet. iii. 13.

A week ago our first missionaries from the Scottish Church started for their work. Tuesday next is appointed as the day for the Diocesan Intercession for Missions. Shall we not make a special effort to be present at the services on that day, and, not only then, but always, to follow them, and help them with our prayers?

And as we pray for workers in the foreign mission field, let us not forget those who labour at home, beseeching the great Head of the Church for both alike, that they may do their part in the development of the plan of God, "that the ministers and stewards of His mysteries may so prepare and make ready His way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at His second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in His sight."

III.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.*

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."—HEB. i. 1, 2.

THIS Second Sunday in Advent has been not unfitly called "the Festival of the Holy Scriptures." The Collect for the day is a prayer that we may rightly use and duly profit by the Scriptures which God has given us. The keynote of the Epistle is struck in its opening words, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience, and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope;"† and even the Gospel, widely separated though it is from both Collect and Epistle in its general scope, retains an echo of their subject in its last sentence, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."‡

And it is certainly a wise provision that the Church has set apart one day of the year on which the value and importance of the Scriptures, the written Word, is thus prominently brought before us. For let us

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Second Sunday in Advent, 1895.

† Rom. xv. 4. ‡ Luke xxi. 33.

remember that this is a matter on which all Christians are agreed. Controversies, indeed, many and bitter, have raged round the precise position which the Bible ought to hold in the Christian system. Men have disputed whether Scripture is to be preferred as an authority to the tradition of the Church. There have been discussions innumerable as to the exact sphere to which each is to be confined. There have been differences of opinion, also, as to the basis on which the authority of Scripture rests, and as to the limits of the Canon. But when we leave theories, and come to practice, we find all Christians at one in the reverence which they accord to the oracles of God. To whatever Church, or sect, or school of thought they may belong, Christian men and women look upon the Bible as containing a message from God to men. Romanists, Anglicans, Protestants of all sects, are engaged in searching the Scriptures. They draw from them inspiration for their lives, encouragement in duty, comfort in sorrow, ever-growing knowledge of God. Surely, then, it cannot be unfitting that we should be reminded, year by year, of the extent to which advance in the spiritual life depends on diligent reading of the Scriptures.

And yet, I fancy, for many of us there exist some difficulties in entering into the full spirit of the Collect appointed for our use to-day—and that on more grounds than one. It is because I am sure that these difficulties are felt, and because I believe that the text supplies us with the means of diminishing or removing them, that I have chosen it as the subject of our meditation.

First of all, some of us experience some little sense of incongruity in having our thoughts directed at this particular time of the year to the subject of the Holy Scriptures. Advent is the season specially set apart for meditating upon the coming of Christ. What connexion, we are inclined to say, have the Scriptures with that subject, more than with any other of those which are brought under our notice in the course of the Christian year? Why might we not have our Festival of the Scriptures as well in Lent, or after Easter? Why not very much better at Whitsuntide, when our thoughts are turned to the work of God the Holy Ghost, "who spake by the prophets"?

Now, let us begin by trying to realize the purpose and meaning of the Advent season. We are accustomed, I think, to associate it with the second coming of our Lord, to judge the quick and the dead. But one is not sure that this was originally intended to be the thought most prominently connected with it. Its very position in the Calendar is a witness to the contrary. It occupies the few weeks preceding the great festival of Christmas. It is meant to prepare us for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, just as Lent prepares us for Easter, the Feast of His Resurrection. It is plain that the first coming of Christ claims to be thought of in Advent, no less than His second coming to judge the world. Both these must be blended in our meditations, even as in the Collect which is enjoined for daily use we have them side by side—"the time of this mortal life, in which Thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility"; "the last day, when He shall come again

in His glorious Majesty." Whatever else Advent may be, it is a season for dwelling upon the *Incarnation*, which makes both first and second coming a possibility; it is a time for thinking of that great truth, God manifest in the flesh, of whose tokens we are reminded in the events which, one after another, the Christian holy days commemorate—His Birth, His Death, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost.

The Incarnation is our Advent theme. And what does the Incarnation mean? Much, truly; but among the rest, this: that God, in these last days, is revealed to men. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."* Or, to put it in the language of our text, "God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by His Son." Gradually, piecemeal, in fragmentary fashion,† God was making Himself and His will known by the Old Testament writers. The full revelation has come with the Incarnate Christ. This is but the crown, the completion, the fulfilment of all that went before. The work of the prophets was the same in kind as the work of the Incarnate God: what they did partially and imperfectly, He did completely and perfectly.

It is, then, no interruption to our Advent thoughts about the Word made flesh that for one week we should be reminded of the Word revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. And if this is true of the

* John i. 18.

† "By divers *portions* and in divers manners" (R.V.).

writings of the Old Testament, it is still more true of those of the New Testament. The former are but the preparation for, the introduction to, the Incarnation; the latter are its natural sequence. They are the record of the facts; they develop the facts into their natural results; they narrate the founding and building up of the Church, which has for its basis the Incarnation of God. So fitly is the Festival of the Scriptures, New and Old alike, introduced into the season of Advent.

The text, then, has enabled us to see that there is no real inconsistency with the general purpose of Advent in the fact that, for one of its weeks, we should be asked to meditate upon the revelation of God in the Bible. But another and a more serious difficulty remains, which can only be touched upon very briefly. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime," says St. Paul, in to-day's Epistle—he is speaking of the Old Testament—"whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." The question occurs to us, Could he have penned these words with so much confidence if he had lived in these days of doubt and of controversy? The air is full of the "Higher Criticism." Men of vast learning, of unwearied diligence, of marvellous acuteness, seek to apply its methods to the Sacred Books. Their researches, we are told, are working sad havoc with traditional beliefs. Men are expressing doubts whether David wrote any of the Psalms which have been usually ascribed to him; that Moses had any part in the writing of the first five Books of our Bible is freely denied; the work which we call the

Book of Isaiah is said to be a collection of not very well assorted fragments of half-a-dozen or more writers living at different epochs. These assertions may or may not be true; but at least the minds of many are disturbed and distressed by them. They cannot investigate such matters for themselves: they are thrown into doubt and disquiet by the confident statements of others: they begin to feel, not only that their faith in the Old Testament Scriptures is becoming less assured, but that their whole religious belief is being undermined; that their hold upon the great truths of the Gospel, upon which they have hitherto rested, is, in some undefined way, becoming less secure. How on this Festival of the Scriptures shall we try to give them some little help and comfort?

First, by asking them to believe that this scare, caused by the "Higher Criticism," is no new thing, unheard of until now. Fifty years ago a similar battle to that which is now raging was being fought on another field. And it was a fiercer and more awful conflict. Then men were making startling and confident statements about the New Testament Scriptures. Christians were told that the greater number of its books were forgeries; that they were of no historical value; that to believe their narratives was folly. And what was the result? Overhasty statements were met by careful criticism; a study of the New Testament was entered upon more minute and searching perhaps than was ever undertaken before, and now the contest is almost over. The "Higher Critics" are retreating from the field;

the old beliefs about the New Testament are, in the main, re-established. We may read the Books with more assurance than ever that they are genuine records of actual facts. The controversy about the New Testament Books has issued in a vast gain to the Church of Christ. The assault, which seemed at one time to be about to rob us of our hope, has brought about this great result, that we can read the early documents of our Faith with better founded assurance of their value, and with much fuller understanding of their meaning, than could have been attained before the struggle began.

This we know to have been the history of the criticism of the New Testament during the past half century or more. And why may not the history of Old Testament criticism follow a similar course? Already there are signs that it tends in the same direction. Surely those who are prudent—much more those who trust in God—will do well to await the future with patience. One thing at least is certain. The Old Testament is now being studied with a care and reverence almost without parallel in the past; and a period of such study cannot leave us just as we were before. When the battle of the Old Testament is over, men will read the Jewish Scriptures in a way differing in many things from that in which they read them now. God grant that it may be with more understanding and with more profit. No more fitting use could be made of this day's Collect than to use it as a prayer directed to this end—a prayer not only for ourselves, but for all, orthodox and unorthodox, who are trying, under the guidance

of the Holy Ghost, to learn more of the truth about the Old Testament Scriptures, "that they may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them," that more and more they may have sure hope in Christ.

It is by no means a certainty that traditional views about the Old Testament are about to be cast to the winds by the newer criticism. This is one suggestion of comfort in the present distress. But there remains another.

I make bold to say that if the wildest hypothesis as yet suggested by the most advanced critic of the Old Testament were accepted as true, our Faith would be in all essentials exactly as it has always been. It may startle us perhaps to be told that the Book of Deuteronomy was written in the time of the captivity; but does it really affect the vital facts of Christianity? It jars upon many a sacred association to have it hinted that the twenty-second Psalm was not written by the sweet psalmist of Israel, or that the fifty-third chapter of the "Book of Isaiah" was penned by one who lived long after Isaiah's death; but does either passage for that speak one whit the less of Christ? The fact is, that the problems in Old Testament study which are now being discussed by critics are of infinitely little importance to Christians, though in themselves of the deepest interest. Whatever may become of them all, the statement of our text remains: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, *hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.*" The Incarnation is the supreme fact in the world's

history. What matters it if all else be taken away, if that only be left? God hath spoken unto us by His Son. The Word became flesh. The only begotten Son hath declared the Father. What more can we need for the full assurance of Faith? The word of prophecy was as a lamp that shineth in a dark place; but for us the Day-star hath appeared;* the Sun of Righteousness hath arisen, with healing in His wings.†

* 2 Pet. i. 19 (R.V.). † Mal. iv. 2.

IV.

THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON.*

"And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against; yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."—LUKE ii. 34, 35 (R.V.).

BISHOP BUTLER reminds us that the religious view of life, regarded as a state of probation, is that it was intended to prepare us, by discipline and improvement in virtue—in other words, by the development of character—for a more perfect state which is to follow. He tells us, moreover, that this process of development by discipline implies also, as its necessary condition, the *manifestation* of men's characters as they now are. And he applies both these statements to the special case of the probation afforded by a revelation, claiming, indeed, to be Divine, but whose claims are supported by evidence which, in the nature of things, cannot amount to demonstration. The uncertainty of the evidence of religion may be for some men even a principal part of their trial here. It creates a difficulty, which might not otherwise

* Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, Feast of the Circumcision, 1899.

exist, in the practice of virtue, and so assists in the *development* of character; it gives an opportunity, which without it they could not have, for the *manifestation* of character—for making plain to others what manner of men they are.

All this, of course, implies its converse. By their trials in this life men may be made, not more fitted, but less fitted, for the life to come. The character which is developed, as well as that which is made manifest, may be evil, not good.

In saying all this, Butler does no more than clothe in philosophical language, and state in a more general form, two principles which seem to underlie the words of Simeon to the Virgin Mother. The ministry of her Child was to have a twofold issue. For some it would result in the raising and ennobling of their lives, by strengthening and perfecting whatever there was of good in them. "This Child is appointed for the rising of many in Israel." But no less for others would the result be degradation and disaster. He was appointed for falling as well as for rising to those to whom He ministered. In both cases alike, character, for good or ill, was to be developed. But development pre-supposes manifestation. The ministry of the Christ must bring to light what was undiscovered and latent; thoughts out of many hearts must be revealed. Simeon's main conception of the work of the Child Jesus was that it would tend to the manifestation, the fixing, and so the developing of character.

It appears natural to assume that the words—regarded in the Authorized Version as a parenthesis

—which foreshadow the future of St. Mary herself, have a close relation to this general line of thought. Must not the prediction that a sword would pierce through her soul also, be a reminder that her unique position as the mother of the Saviour did not exempt her from the probation through which all had to pass who listened to the teaching and beheld the mighty works of her Son? But the commentators, with a unanimity which is unusual, resort to another interpretation. From Origen to Professor Ramsay of Aberdeen in his latest work,* they bid us find in the simile of the sword a picture of the sufferings which the career of the Christ would of necessity entail upon His mother. There is more difference of opinion when the attempt is made to determine the special nature of the sufferings which are foretold, the particular incident of her career to which the words apply. Some, with reason, as it would seem, leave the reference vague and undefined. The Christ was a great Reformer. He was the leader of a religious revolution. He was therefore certain to meet with fierce opposition from the votaries of the ancient traditions and the ancient faith. He was a sign which would be spoken against. His life would inevitably be one of sorrow; and with every anguish of her Son, the mother's heart would be torn. Others, becoming a little more precise, would have us think of some unknown eclipse of faith, by which the Virgin's confidence in the Divine mission of her Son was clouded. Epiphanius, with no less imagination, will have it that Simeon foresees her martyrdom.

* *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* p. 76.

But the dominant view, stereotyped in the words of one of the few Sequences which still remain in the Roman missal, finds in the mention of the sword piercing her soul an allusion to the agony of the Mother as she watched her Divine Son hanging upon the cross, and dying the malefactor's death—

> "Stabat Mater dolorosa
> Juxta crucem lacrimosa,
> Qua pendebat Filius,
> Cuius animam gementem
> Contristantem et dolentem
> Pertransiuit gladius."

The interpretation of the popular mediaeval hymn has had its attractions for some recent German critics. It enables them to infer a contrast between the excellence of St. Luke's materials and his unhistorical method of dealing with them. The evangelist, they tell us, had in his hands a document of the earliest date, so early, in fact, that the Virgin birth had not yet found its way into it. But he revised it, putting into the mouth of Simeon words which Simeon could not have spoken. This plain allusion to the Crucifixion is at once a proof and an instance of his additions to his ancient authority. It seems strange that an editor, who, whatever his faults, was not altogether wanting in literary skill, should introduce into his narrative at this early stage a reference to the sorrow of the mother at the Cross, and yet, when he comes to describe the scene, forget to tell us that she was present.*

* The presence of St. Mary at the Crucifixion is mentioned by St. John only.

It is surely more scientific, on any theory of the authorship or editorship of the third Gospel, to inquire, first of all, what the words are likely to have meant as they stand, and, if possible, to give them a meaning which is in harmony with their context. Bleek and Alford stand almost alone in finding in them a sentiment which fulfils this condition. But they omit to notice what seems to be the closest parallel in Holy Scripture to the words ascribed to Simeon. It is the familiar passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "The Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing through even to the dividing of the soul and of the spirit, moreover of the joints and of the marrow, and quick to discern the feelings and thoughts of the heart."*

The parallelism of this passage with the words of Simeon is obvious. The writer is on the verge of using the language of St. John, and identifying Christ with the Word of God. "The truth that Christ is the Gospel which He brings," says Westcott, "is present to the writer's mind, and influences his form of expression. Thus the passage shows how naturally the transition was made from the revelation of God to Him who was at once the Revelation and the Revealer." And so it is with Simeon. To him the Infant Christ was not only the light-bearer, but the light: "a light for revelation of the Gentiles."† In the words before us, He is a sign which was spoken against, a *σημεῖον* in the sense in which the word is

* Heb. iv. 12. The Revised Version is followed in part.

† Luke ii. 32: *φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν.*

applied to His miracles, a visible token which reveals heaven to earth. In both passages again the Word is compared to a sword, and in both the motive of the comparison is the same: "The Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing through to the dividing of the *soul;*" "This child is a sign, and a sword shall pierce through thine own *soul* also." And in both cases, the piercing of the soul by the Divine revelation results in the manifestation of character: "It is a discerner of the thoughts of the heart;" "Thoughts out of many hearts shall be revealed."

In the saying of Simeon, then, we have a summary, from one point of sight, of the results of the ministry of Jesus. The Gospel which He preached, and with which He Himself was identical, was to lead to the manifestation of latent character. Character, once revealed, tends to become fixed and developed; and so His preaching was to be for rising or for falling to those who heard. By being brought into contact with the Christ, men entered upon a probation; and Mary herself was no exception to the rule.

In the Gospels we have recorded the fulfilment in history of the prediction. Acts of tenderest sympathy; words of deepest penetration, at times winning and persuasive, at times scathing in their severity, lay bare the inmost character of His hearers. He gathers round Him the outcast, men and women despised by the religious world of that day—not altogether unjustly despised, since they had touched the lowest depths of moral degradation—and He lifts them up to the level of a pure and self-denying life. But how? Was it not by discovering

in them, by bringing out into the light of day, by making known to themselves, as well as to others, the traits of virtue, upon which might be raised the superstructure of holiness? They came to Him bound with the chains of vice. From Him they first learned to feel within themselves the stirrings of love and self-sacrificing devotion, and to obey them. Old courses were abandoned, and, by patient continuance in well-doing, those who were vilest were made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Among those who accepted the teaching and claims of Jesus, to whom He was appointed for rising, were Matthew the publican, and the woman who was a sinner, to whom He forgave much, because she loved much. Truly many that were last became first.

And, on the other hand, many that were first became last. Scribes and Pharisees, religious leaders of all kinds, were shown forth in their true colours. In relentless and unsparing language their shortcomings were denounced.* Their character was exposed, but they themselves were not softened. Their opposition to the truth became only more determined; they were more wedded than ever to old prejudices; their hatred of Jesus became more intense; their rejection of His claims more decided.† Their evil thoughts were revealed, and so became fixed. By their rejection of the Gospel they fell.

Now, it seems important to notice, if we are to believe the account of the matter given us in the Gospels, that the question of the acceptance or of

* Matt. xxiii. 1-36. † Matt. xxvii. 62, ff.

the rejection of the claims of Christ was presented, not as an intellectual, but as a moral problem. It is absurd to think of publicans and harlots, of Galilean fisherfolk, or of the common people who heard Him gladly, balancing probabilities one against another; examining, with critical care, the postulates of the current theology, and deciding for the new Teacher on the grounds of pure reason. His teaching appealed to them—can only have appealed to them—because it touched a chord in their hearts which the exponents of the prevailing orthodoxy had failed to touch. They followed Christ because of the moral beauty of His life and teaching, because they felt that He had probed the inmost recesses of their moral nature, because He held out to them the prospect of moral regeneration and a new life.

And even those who might have been expected to judge of the validity of the claims of Christ by an intellectual standard, made their appeal to reason and argument, only to support a conclusion arrived at on other grounds. The leaders of Jewish religion, already determined to reject Him, endeavour to pose Him with hard questions.* They are compelled to acknowledge defeat on their self-chosen ground; but they remain unconvinced. The real cause of their ultimate rejection of the Lord was inveterate prejudice, hatred of a moral teacher who regarded the righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees as a thing of no account in the kingdom of heaven, a heart devoid of real religion. If there were others for

* Matt. xxii. 15-46.

whom the whole matter depended on intellectual conviction, who, perhaps, like the Bereans, "searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so,"* and yet had difficulties which they could not overcome, they must have been a small class. We hear nothing of them in the Gospels. We know nothing of the consequence to themselves and to their life of their rejection of the Truth. The rule certainly was that he whose will was to do the will of God had assurance within himself that the teaching was Divine.† Those who accepted the Gospel were raised, those who rejected it fell, because acceptance was based on a moral triumph, rejection on a moral failure.

The fact, then, that the Jews of the time of Christ were brought under the influence of His teaching was an element in their moral probation. Are the words of Simeon as true of us as they were of them? Can it be said that the knowledge of Christian teaching is for us, in these later days, a part of our probation? Most surely it is, if the investigation of truth is subject to the control of the moral laws, in the same way as the active duties of life; most surely, if moral character is of any use as a guide to the perception of religious verity; most surely, if humility and patience, if sincerity and earnestness, if freedom from prejudice and simplicity of mind, are moral as well as intellectual qualities. Here is a system which announces itself as a revelation from God, which asserts that it is the absolute truth, which claims to be the only sure foundation of the

* Acts xvii. 11. † John vii. 17 (R.V.).

highest morality. By its very existence, by its very dogmatism, it challenges inquiry. Is it not a moral duty—I speak to those who are pledged more than others to engage themselves in the search for truth—is it not a moral duty, at least for us, to investigate its claims, and to determine for ourselves whether we shall accept or reject them? Is it not certain that our character is affected for good or for ill, according as we acknowledge and perform this duty or decline it?

But a warning is needed. The question of the truth of Christianity is, for us, far more a question of intellect than it seems to have been for the Jews of Apostolic times. And just so far as it is a question of intellect, the result of its honest investigation in any individual case must be doubtful. The matter of real importance is, not the *result* of the inquiry, but the spirit in which it is undertaken, the diligence and the singleness of purpose with which it is conducted. It is no more than a truism to say that men, whose lives would have been called saintly if they could have subscribed to the Christian faith, have been unable to profess belief in the teaching of the Church. It would be nothing but absurd to think that, for such men as these, the rejected Gospel is a cause of moral decline. Their devotion to truth; their honest determination to follow their God-given reason, whithersoever it leads them, must exalt and purify them none the less, though it involve them in separation from the Christian Church—all the more, if it entails the surrender of beliefs which, to many of them, have been beyond price. The converse

truth is, perhaps, less often under our view. The man who thinks he believes the teaching of Christ, without the honest attempt to investigate the foundations on which it rests, does not really believe it. If he professes to believe it, he is guilty of the moral offence of falsehood. The religion of Christ has perhaps come to him as an inheritance from his ancestors, or as the prevailing belief of those whom he most respects for goodness. He takes it as he finds it, and gives no real thought to the question, Is it true? The powers of his mind are expended on the study of literature or of science; while the problem of problems remains for him unsolved. To treat the question of religion in this way is to fail in the probation which the proclamation of the Christian faith among us implies; it discloses a character of which carelessness, as to the highest aspect of truth, is a trait. If the character develops in the natural course, the end will be want of earnestness and purpose in life. The teaching of the faith of Christ, which should have tended to raise and ennoble the man, whatever his ultimate view as to its truth might be, can issue only in failure and moral degradation, no matter what may be his nominal creed.

Among the resolutions which we may make as we enter upon a new year, this surely may be one: that in whatever other studies we may be engaged, we shall be careful in religion, so far as we may, to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.

V.

THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS.*

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—2 Cor. xii. 9.

I CHOOSE this verse for our consideration this morning, because it seems the best commentary—it is St. Paul's own commentary—on the passage which has been read as the Epistle for to-day. And to-day's Epistle, together with its context, is one which is certainly in need of explanation. It is almost the only one in which the great Apostle appears in the character of a boaster. For his boasts, indeed, he apologizes again and again: "I speak foolishly," he says; "I speak as a madman;"† "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were in folly, in this confidence of boasting;"‡ "I am become a fool in boasting, but ye have compelled me."§ But in spite of this apology, in spite of this excusing of himself, he *does* boast. With all its pathos, with all its surpassing beauty, with all its revelation of the character of St. Paul, with all

* Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, Sexagesima, 1899.
† 2 Cor. xi. 21, 23. ‡ 2 Cor. xi. 17. § 2 Cor. xii. 11.

the fervour and enthusiasm which have made it familiar to all—dear to all—that whole section of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians of which our Epistle is a specimen, is one long boast. Nay, if it were not a boast, it would lose its enthusiasm and fervour, its beauty and pathos, its revealing of personal character. Is it not worth while to ask ourselves how it came about that St. Paul played a part which seems so unlike himself? What can have induced him thus to brag of his ministerial experiences? What was the overpowering necessity laid upon him by the Corinthians, as he himself says, which compelled him to vaunt about his work, and to compare himself with others whom he plainly regarded as his inferiors? What makes him so impassioned, so fervid in his boasting?

The answer is not hard to find. It is written in every page of this Epistle, and of others which were written by him about the same time. The Church, in the days of St. Paul, was by no means the undivided concordant society which we are sometimes apt to picture it. Those early Christians were not all of one mind. They were divided into parties which waged bitter war against each other; the Church of Corinth, in particular, was rent asunder with internal strife. St. Paul himself was the leader of a party, and of of a party, moreover, which, in the earliest days, was not a popular one. Its essential principles went right in the teeth of the prejudices and the hereditary habits of thought of the first disciples, nay, of the Apostles themselves. St. Paul was the originator of what may well be called "the Catholic movement"

in the Apostolic Church. He was the first who clearly conceived that the mission of the Church was world-wide; the first who saw that it was to be no mere sect of Judaism, but the Church of the whole world, of Jew and Gentile alike. And on the strength of this great principle, he formed and led a party in the Church of Christ. It was the party which ultimately prevailed; the party which was destined in the end to embrace within itself Christians of all denominations and sects. But its triumph came only after long and strenuous contest; and St. Paul was in the van of the fight. He struggled might and main for the Catholic principle, not because it was the principle of a party, but because it was the truth of God. He knew that the Church's fulfilment of her mission, that the Church's very existence, depended on her acceptance of that principle; and, therefore, whosoever it might be that opposed him—even though it were St. Peter himself—the great Apostle of the Gentiles stood firm; he admitted no compromise. God, for him and for all who followed him, was the God, not of the few only, but of all the earth.

And as he fought this noble battle for the Catholicity of the Church of God, there happened again and again what, to a tender and sympathetic heart such as his, must have been a cause of unspeakable grief. As he went about from city to city, planting Churches, and labouring to instruct them in the faith and love of Christ, his footsteps were dogged by teachers of the other party. They did not scruple to use means which were at least questionable to alienate his converts from him. They tried to

persuade them, and in too many cases they succeeded, that St. Paul was, after all, no true Apostle; that they themselves had more right to be listened to than he had. And so, in this congregation and in that, those whom he loved so dearly were drawn away from him. His own children in the faith, those whom he had himself begotten in the Gospel, were listening to other teachers; they were going back to false and narrow views of the Gospel. His work among them was being undone. So it was at Corinth. Was it any wonder that he wrote passionately to his erring children there? Was it any wonder that hands trembling with emotion penned sentences which cannot be construed; that eyes blinded with tears refused to guide the pen to write smooth and rounded periods? The fatherly heart of the Apostle must have been ready to break.

But, after all, it was no mere personal matter. The glory of God was at stake; the glory of Christ was at stake; the being of the Church was endangered. The party of narrowness must be put down; the truth must be upheld at whatever cost. And if this was to be done at Corinth, the Corinthians must be convinced that St. Paul could speak with authority; he must vindicate his claims to Apostleship; he must show that he had as much right—nay, far more right—to be called an Apostle than those teachers who, in his absence, had gained a footing among them, and who falsely usurped the name. And so he is led to the argument of this day's Epistle; so he is led to compare himself with others; so he is led to boast.

Listen to his words: "I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold (I speak foolishly) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I."* There is comparison here; but there is scarcely the semblance of boasting. These false teachers, no doubt, had based their authority on their boldness in preaching, on their pure descent from Abraham, on their inheritance in the covenant and promises of God to Israel. St. Paul does but put himself on an equality with them in these things. He, too, is bold; he, too, is a Hebrew of Hebrews. But the boasting was to come. If *his* message was to be accepted in preference to theirs, he must not merely prove that he was their equal, he must declare himself their superior in his apostolic office. And so he goes on, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am *more;* in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things

* 2 Cor xi. 21, 22.

that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak?" *

Is it not strange boasting? Is not the argument something quite different from what we might have expected it to be? Not one word about his Hebrew learning, gathered at the feet of Gamaliel, in which we can have little doubt he excelled his opponents; not one word of that marvellous conversion which, in one moment, both brought him to Christ and revealed to him the great principle of catholicity itself; not one word of his marvellous success as a teacher of the Gospel. No; his boast is of his sorrows, his weakness, his dangers. He sums it all up himself: "If I must needs boast, I will boast of the things which concern mine infirmities." † And so he continues as his appeal proceeds. For one moment he refers to a revelation from God: how he was caught up into the third heaven, and heard unutterable things; but of this he does not *boast;* he comes back at once to his infirmity.‡ He speaks of the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, and of his thrice-repeated unavailing prayer that it might depart from him.§ The whole burden of his boasting is not his *power*, but his *weakness*—the contrast between the man and his message, between the treasure of great price, and the earthen vessel to which it was committed.‖

What does it all mean? How were the Corinthians to be convinced of his apostleship by being reminded

* 2 Cor. xi. 23-29. † 2 Cor. xi. 30. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 1-5.
§ 2 Cor. xii. 7-9. ‖ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

of his infirmity? Is not the explanation contained in the answer of God to his prayer—"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness"? That was the real point. He had to make clear to them that the grace of God was with him. And his own weakness was the very proof of it. What else but the grace of God could have triumphed over weakness so manifest, over personal defects so many?

I do not think that we always realize how little St. Paul had in himself to recommend his message. Yet try to imagine for one moment an incident in his career.* He is at Perga in Pamphylia. The hot, damp, enervating atmosphere of the place works its effect upon him. He is stricken down with malarial fever. At length he is moved to the hill-country, and he comes to Antioch of Pisidia. And there he preaches. After all, what was he? A low-sized man, bow-legged, of unprepossessing appearance,† weak from his recent illness,‡ contemptible in speech.§ And yet, with it all, what marvels he wrought! They received him as an angel of God.‖ Within a little while a Church was founded. The new-won converts loved him so, that they would have plucked out their own eyes, and given them to him.¶ Was it really that insignificant-looking, stammering Paul that did

* See Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 62, 63.

† *Ib.*, p. 32.

‡ Gal. iv. 13 (R.V.).

§ 2 Cor. x. 10.

‖ Gal. iv. 14. The correctness of the "South Galatian" theory of Professor Ramsay is assumed.

¶ Gal. iv. 15.

all this? Or was it not rather the power of God working in him? Surely, his very weakness was the proof of his mission; his very insufficiency the token that his sufficiency was of God.

Brethren, do we not see the same thing repeated day by day? Who is the preacher of whom you will ask advice in trouble or in doubt? Who is the man whom you instinctively feel to have a message from God for you? Is it he whose natural gifts are many? Is it he who, by eloquence, can stir the hearts of hundreds? You know it is not. He may lead you to think much of himself; but perhaps his very brilliancy hinders him from impressing upon you that the message is not his own, but God's. Is there not many a one whose learning is not great, whose ability to speak is small, but who has yet a mysterious power of touching your lips with fire from the heavenly altar? Is not his life, and his silent, loving work, even by reason of the absence of natural talent, a witness that the grace of God is in him, that the power of God is in very truth doing by him what the power of man could not do?

And in this thought, which is brought before us so forcibly to-day, of the feebleness of man and the might of God, is there not a lesson which some of us may need to learn? There may be some here to-day who are depressed by the thought of their own weakness, of their insignificance in the world. They would like to do good, but they cannot. They would like to teach, but they have not the intellectual power to do it. They would like to work for God, but feeble health makes it impossible. Dear friends, let no

such thought cast us down. We do good, not by intellectual greatness, not by bodily strength, but by the power of God. And His grace is sufficient for the weakest among us; for His strength is made perfect in weakness. Cherish the grace of God that is in you. Try with humility and patience to live the Christian life, and you need do no more. God, who worked mightily through the infirmity of St. Paul, will work through you also. Your life, though you know it not, will serve His kingdom and advance His glory. Your weakness will be the testimony to His power. When you are weak, then are you strong.*

And lastly, when we are depressed, as we all are at times, by the thought of our powerlessness for good, let us remember one more truth which the words of God declare—"My strength is made perfect in weakness." The meaning is not that all in one moment the weak become strong. The growth in strength is a gradual and continuous process. "My strength *is being made perfect*† in weakness." The grace of God is like a plant which takes long to attain its full growth; which needs tending and care to grow at all. And the soil in which it naturally flourishes is infirmity. If you are weak, and know your weakness, you are of those who may most easily cultivate that precious flower of the grace of God. You at least cannot lean on your own strength. See, then, that you lean on the strength of God. The more we feel that we are weak, the more we lean upon God, the more will the grace of God grow within us. By our very weakness it will wax

* 2 Cor. xii. 10. † τελεῖται.

stronger; and by-and-by, here or hereafter, it will become perfect. Yes, if we could only realize the disguised blessings which are often veiled under infirmity, those who are weak in body, or feeble in mental grasp, would not repine or complain; they would not be saddened or depressed; they would rather echo the triumphant words of St. Paul: "Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

VI.

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.*

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."—MATT. iv. 1.

"In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."—HEB. iv. 15.

THERE is scarcely any event in our Lord's earthly life more shrouded in mystery and in difficulty than the temptation in the wilderness. The great mystery of all—that One who was not only Man but God could have experienced the misery and the struggle of allurement to sin—is an enigma which we cannot solve. It follows us all through the Gospel story. We feel it most of all when the cry from the cross falls upon our ears, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"† How could the Man who was truly God say that? The same mystery is with us, though perhaps in less degree, when we try to realize the meaning of the statement that Jesus was tempted of the devil. The God-Man tempted: how can it be?

But the story of the temptation has peculiar difficulties all its own. The difficulties, in fact, are so great that there have been in all ages expositors who

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Lent, 1896. † Matt. xxvii. 46.

have found it impossible to regard this narrative as one which is to be accepted in its *literal* meaning, as, for instance, the story of the feeding of the five thousand is accepted, or that of the raising of Christ from the dead. Think for one moment what the words in which St. Matthew recounts the incident imply, if they are taken without any reserve, in their literal meaning. Christ has been forty days in the desert fasting. Then the devil appears to Him, and suggests to Him that He should satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread. He refuses. And now mark what follows. Faint and weary with His long fast, He is taken by the devil, and placed upon the pinnacle of the temple; and there a fresh temptation awaits Him. The journey to Jerusalem was accomplished by miracle, say some of the commentators; but the evangelists do not say so. Unless we import a great deal into the story, we must believe that it represents Jesus as travelling in His weariness from the wilderness to Jerusalem, for no purpose except that He might be tempted, and with no guide on the way save Satan. But that is not all. Christ remains on the temple not more, it would seem, than a few moments, when the tempter once more transports Him to the top of an exceeding high mountain, to present to Him there His third temptation to sin. I suppose Mount Hermon in the far north is the nearest mountain to Jerusalem which, with even the largest allowance for rhetoric, could be described as one from which all the kingdoms of the world could be seen. During His temptation, then, faint with His long fasting, Christ journeyed from the desert to Jerusalem,

from Jerusalem to Hermon, and all this at the bidding of Satan. It is surely something almost inconceivable—something very hard to receive as *literal* fact.

Now, I trust that no one will misunderstand what I say. I trust that no one will imagine that I am trying to prove that the account given us of the temptation of Christ in the Gospels is not a *true* story. I do most thoroughly believe it to be true ; but that is not the same thing as believing that it is a bald, hard statement of facts, to be read in the same way as yesterday's newspaper reports. What I do feel is, that to read it in such a way is really to deprive it of its truth. This journeying to and fro, if we are to take it literally, makes the story read like a got-up thing, like a dramatic performance : it suggests to us that the temptation of Christ was something unreal, something done for effect, something totally unlike that which you and I know only too well : it certainly does not leave the impression that He was tempted in all points like as we are.

Let me mention something else in the narrative, as very commonly understood, which still further obscures the reality of the temptation. If we take St. Matthew's account as a mere matter-of-fact record, we naturally, I think, suppose that there was an actual personal appearance of Satan to Christ. Christ is represented as conversing with him. He would appear to have recognised him as the prince of evil. The devil came not—at least there is no hint that he came—transformed into an angel of light. And certainly those who have tried to represent the

scene on canvas, accepting St. Matthew's account as a statement of literal facts, have been pretty unanimously consistent in giving him an appearance which was not likely to commend his words.

Now, if Satan appeared to Christ *as Satan*, even under the most attractive of forms, this was no true temptation, such as we experience every day. Let us put the case to ourselves. If Satan appeared in bodily form to us, and we knew that he was Satan; if he asked us to do anything, no matter what, would not that very fact brand it at once as evil? Should we not loathe and abhor it? Should we not at once fly from him? Would not every inducement which we might have felt to do the deed, by the very fact of his asking us to do it, be removed?

So it must have been with Christ. If the devil really appeared to Him in bodily shape, avowing himself to be Satan, his power to tempt was gone.

And once again. Those who read St. Luke's story of the temptation will at once see that by that Evangelist it was not looked upon as an event standing by itself, and without parallel in the remainder of His earthly life. "When the devil," he says, "had completed every temptation, he departed from Him *for a season*."* Only for a season. The fierce conflict did not bring to an end the assaults of the devil. Again and again the tempter tried to mar the life of spotless purity, just as he did in the wilderness. And few of us, I think, will fail to recognise a last despairing effort of the evil one to draw away the Saviour from holiness, in the Garden, on the very Cross itself. We cannot

* Luke iv. 13 (R.V.).

but believe that the temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane was, if we may so express it, of a piece with that in the wilderness. But yet in the garden there was no visible appearance of the tempter; it was an intense, a fearful contest between the higher and the lower, the willingness of the spirit and the weakness of the flesh. It appeals to us because it is verified in our daily life. It helps and comforts us in temptation, because we feel that Christ then was tempted even as we are, and yet without sin.

If the story of the temptation in the desert does not attract our sympathies in the same way, may it not be because we have to some extent misunderstood it? May we not have confused the fact with what is really the mode of its expression? So, at least, it seems to me; and so it has seemed to many whose fitness for unravelling the mystery of the temptation of Christ is greater far than mine.

Was it a vision? I cannot think so. Is it told in metaphorical language? It may be so. Is it the narrative of a real historical occurrence in the earthly life of Christ? I have no doubt at all that it is.

The thought which I wish to leave with you is simply this: the journeys of Christ from the desert to the holy city, from the city to the mountain, are not of the essence of the story. No more is the appearance of the devil, in visible, still less in human, form. These are but the setting in which the fact is placed. The *fact* is Christ tempted, and tempted as we are all tempted, by the devil, the world, and the flesh. Where tempted, in what precise form the temptation came, these questions are of little

moment. But let us see that we give them no answer inconsistent with the statement that Christ was in all points tempted like as we are; for if we do, the comfort, the strength, the meaning of the story has for us vanished.

Now, what lessons may we learn from the story of the temptation, when we keep hold of the fact that it tells of a real event in the life of Jesus Christ—just such an event as may happen any day in your life or in mine?

That is a question which I suppose no one would attempt to answer fully in a short sermon. But there is one lesson which may not be without its use to us in this time of self-examination. "He was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet* without sin:" that exception marks a world of difference. It means that Christ has passed through the same conflicts in which we have been; but it means, too, that where He conquered, we may have failed. It means that His *temptations* may have been our *sins*.

Look, then, at those three temptations. Use them as tests for your own hearts. Prove your own selves whether you have not fallen into those sins the enticing power of which was felt by the Son of God.

First, the devil says to Him: "Make these stones into bread." Is it not strange to think that anything so commonplace as mere hunger could be a real temptation to Christ? Yet so it was. Surely, here is a warning to us all. We are never so far advanced in the Christian life as to be beyond danger of falling into sins of the flesh. The time can never come for any Christian man or woman when they may cease

to ask themselves, Have I been as I ought to have been with regard to eating and drinking, with regard to purity of thought and action? Even Christ Himself was tempted by the lusts of the flesh. Gluttony, drunkenness, sloth, impurity, seem, no doubt, to be breaches of very elementary laws of morals. This is no reason why we should take for granted that we have not been guilty of them. It seems to be one of the snares in which religious people are sometimes taken, to imagine that, when they have attained to a certain level of piety, they are safe from more ordinary sins. There can be no greater, no more fatal mistake. How often do we meet pious folk, people, I mean, of whose devoutness and spirituality we have no doubt; people, nevertheless, whose word we cannot at all times quite confidently accept as true, whose strictures on others are not always just, who are wanting in simple virtues like straightforwardness, or obedience, or humility, or charity? It is one of the saddest facts in human life; but it is a fact. And by what we see every day in others, we may perhaps learn something about ourselves. At least, Christ was tempted by the bodily appetite of hunger. We, too, may be tempted by very ordinary temptations, and we may fall.

The second temptation had to do with a higher part of the nature of Christ: "Cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Was it not plausible? Was it not the very thing which would appeal to a religious mind, dwell-

ing in communion with God? There was God's promise. How could His servant better show his faith in Him than by acting as if he believed it true? But no. To throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple merely because God had promised to protect Him in all His ways, would be to commit the besetting sin of religious people, spiritual presumption. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Surely spiritual presumption is no uncommon sin in these days—not doubting where we ought to doubt; undertaking work to which God has not called us; fussing about as amateurs in spiritual work; placing our confidence in promises of God, which we so firmly believe that we have never taken the trouble to understand them, or to ask whether they apply to our case or not; and, worst of all, persuading ourselves that it is our *faith* which makes us do these things. These sins are not so uncommon that we can afford to assume they are not ours. Have we been guilty of spiritual presumption? There is a second question for Lenten self-examination. Spiritual presumption was a *temptation* to Christ; it may have been a *sin* to us.

And lastly, the third temptation of Christ was again one which gained its very power and its subtilty from the loftiness of His life aim. "The devil . . . showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, . . . and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." "All these things will I give Thee." What a tremendous promise, and from one who had power to fulfil it! It would have been the very consummation, the crown and

completion of the work of Christ. The whole purpose of the Incarnation would have been achieved. That would have been accomplished at once which St. John could only see in a vision of the far-distant future—which we still wait for after nineteen centuries of the Church's work—the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He their King for ever and ever.* But the condition—"*If* thou wilt fall down and worship me;" if thou wilt dally for one moment with evil, if thou wilt make but one acknowledgment of the power of the Prince of Evil. "Get thee behind me, Satan," said Christ; and the devil fled.

Christ triumphed; but remember, Christ was *tempted.* Where Christ was tempted we may fall. The very loftiness of our aim may lead us to the surrender of principle in order to attain it. Is it not often so?

Brethren, there is no kind of book which would, I should say, have more influence in making unbelievers, in making men doubt the very existence and power of religion, than the biographies of great ecclesiastics. The intrigues, the plots, the deceits, the mean artifices and tricks, the pious frauds of which at least some of them are full, are the most painful things in all literature. How have they come about? The aim is the glory of Christ, the good of Holy Church, the salvation of souls. When the goal is so noble, too close scrutiny need not be used about the way of reaching it. It is the old plea: the end sanctifies the means. No one acknowledges the

* Rev. xi. 15.

principle; but too many act in accordance with it. They fall down and worship Satan, that they may win the kingdoms for Christ. The aim of all work for God is the highest which man can conceive; but God is not satisfied if we dare to attempt to reach it by means that are not right.

Here, then, is our lesson from the temptations of Christ. Where Christ was only tempted, we may have sinned. Prove your own selves; and "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."*

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

VII.

BEARING THE CROSS.*

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."—MATT. xvi. 24.

"LET a man take up his cross, and follow me." Here is an injunction so plain, so simple, so direct, that one might almost be tempted to say that it cannot possibly be misunderstood. No doubt, mistakes have been made about its meaning; but we may perhaps safely affirm that to one who has heard the story of the ministry of Christ for the first time—to one for whom the Gospel narrative has not lost its freshness—it can have but one interpretation, and that the one which the Lord intended it to have.

And yet, clear and evident as its teaching may be to us, to those to whom Christ spoke, this saying must have been absolutely incomprehensible, absolutely devoid of meaning. Its whole force and point is involved in the reference which it contains to the sufferings of the Christ. But who among those who listened to His words really knew, really believed—though He had often told them—that their Lord was to suffer and to die?

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Lent.

But more: those who heard, if they were to understand, must have known not merely that Christ was to *suffer*, but the precise *form* which His sufferings were to take. "Let him *take up his cross*, and follow me." The disciple was to be as his Master, the servant was to be as his Lord; but the Master was to be a crucified Master; the Lord was to be not merely nailed to the tree, He was to *bear* His cross to the place of execution. And which of them all could have foreseen that awful end? Which of them could have guessed that the degrading punishment, reserved for the basest criminals, would have been assigned to the pure and sinless Jesus? Which of them could have thought that against this humble working-man Prophet the power of Rome would accomplish that which His own nation could not do? Which of them, who had believed it possible that He would die upon the cross, could have realized that, faint and weary with suffering, He Himself would bear His cross on the road to Calvary, till He could bear it no longer?

Jesus spoke of bearing the cross to those who knew not what the cross meant. He was, in a manner, speaking to the air. He used a simile to which His hearers could have attached little or no meaning. And yet you will have noticed the strange persistency with which our Lord recurs to it. Again and again He teaches the same lesson, and always with reference more or less distinct to His coming sufferings. Again and again He tells His followers that every true disciple must "bear his cross." And, incomprehensible though it must have been, we find no attempt on

Christ's part to make it clearer by explanation. The true child of the kingdom is to be a cross-bearer. But what is meant by bearing the cross? That He never tells.

Are we not almost forced to ask ourselves why Christ chose to speak thus obscurely? If He really wanted men to learn, why did He not, like other teachers, say plainly what He wished to convey? Why did He clothe it in unmeaning language? Why did He darken it with misty metaphors?

I venture to answer this question by affirming that Christ did all this because it was His deliberately chosen plan of teaching; and I venture to say also that His greatness as a teacher is shown, not only by the wonder and beauty of the truths which He imparted, but also, though in less degree, by the methods of teaching which He adopted.

The difference between a good and a bad teacher is not, as we all know, to be measured by the difference in the amount of knowledge which they possess. The greatest master of a subject is oftentimes the least able to impart a knowledge of it to others. But given that two men have sufficient grasp of a subject to be able to teach it at all, that which makes one of them a good teacher, while the other fails, is mainly the power—the almost inscrutable power—of winning and retaining the attention of his pupils. Every true teacher uses various artifices, consciously or unconsciously, to attain this end. Every teacher knows that it is waste of time to speak, with whatever force and eloquence, with whatever learning, to a dull and listless class. He must so speak that those whom he

addresses will attend, that those who attend will be impressed, that those who are impressed will remember. So, before all things, he must make them take an *interest* in what he has to say. Jesus Christ, the greatest of all teachers, had for learners a little knot of dull Galilean peasants and fishermen. How was He to get them to understand the message which He brought to them from the Father? How, first of all, was He to enlist their interest, their attention?

One of His methods was that of which we have an example in the text. He uttered words which were dark, unmeaning, obscure. In spite of this—rather sometimes in consequence of this—they were striking words. Men could not pass them by, though they could not fathom their meaning. They provoked discussion and thought. The more they were discussed, the oftener they were thought over, the deeper they sank into men's minds, the more indelibly they were imprinted on their memory, though the riddle of their meaning was as far from being solved as ever. No word of the Master helped men to unravel the mystery. But at length the explanation did come. Some event happened, to which at another time they might have given little heed. It recalled the words over which they had puzzled so long; it set them in a fresh light; it revealed, once and for all, the depth of their significance. The lesson which Christ designed to teach was learned; and so learned, it could never again be forgotten.

I have time to take no other illustration of what I mean—perhaps, if I had time, I could take no better—than that which lies before us.

"Let him take up his cross." Can we not picture the wonderment with which the little band of disciples heard the words? They were strange words, unlike anything they had ever heard before. What could they mean? Here was something which every disciple of Christ was to do. *They* were His disciples. Was there here, then, some new way in which they were to show their devotion to Him? Or was it something which they were doing already without being aware that they were doing it? It must be important to know what it means. And yet Christ gives them no help. One thing only is certain: it was no mere idle embellishment of His discourse; it was something which He desired to impress upon them. The very earnestness of His manner, the constancy of His reiteration of the saying, would suffice to assure them of that. They could not but ponder the mysterious words; and so their minds were prepared for the day on which the explanation came.

We know how it was. Jesus is led forth from the judgment-hall, crowned with the cruel chaplet of thorns. Faint and bleeding, weak, helpless, unresisting, He goes along the way of sorrow. As they saw Him pass, struggling under the heavy weight of the cross which was laid upon His shoulders, must not that saying, so often repeated by the Lord, so often the subject of meditation and discussion among themselves—must it not in a moment have flashed back into their minds? The turmoil and tumult of the hours that had passed had left them but little leisure for thought. But now, with no thought of theirs, the explanation which they had so long sought

is found. They have but to see the Lord taking up His cross, and bearing it for them, to understand it all. Now, once and for ever, the lesson is learned which Christ desired to teach.

And what was the lesson? It is simple enough; but it is the whole of the Gospel on its practical side —the sacrifice of self. Christ bore the cross for us; so must we bear our cross for others.

This was the lesson they learnt. And how different it would have been if they had learnt it in any other way! It was branded henceforth ineffaceably on their hearts. Could they ever again think of the scene at Calvary without remembering its teaching—Go, and do thou likewise? Could they ever again think that even Christ pleased not Himself, without being reminded that they, too, must not seek their own will, but must lay it aside for the good of others? Could they ever again acknowledge that, for their sakes, Christ became poor, without resolving afresh that they, too, would become poor, if thereby they might make many rich?* Yes; they knew now, as they never could have known otherwise, the meaning of self-denial, the meaning of Christianity: it is a daily bearing of the cross, a daily following of Christ.

"Bearing the cross." Anyone whose lot it is to come much in contact with those who are in trouble or sorrow, will know how often the phrase rises to Christian lips. We are living perhaps in the unceasing trouble of unsympathetic surroundings; we have ideals and aspirations, we have difficulties, which those with whom we live cannot share or even

* 2 Cor. vi. 10; viii. 9.

understand. Or the trial may be of another kind: it may come from the perpetual worry of insufficient means, even of deepest poverty; we live from hand to mouth, unable to look forward beyond the passing day. Or again, our life is one long struggle against natural weakness and delicacy. We long to do some good work, but our infirmity bars the way. Or our sorrow may arise from some sharp and sudden calamity—from loss of money, or sickness, or bereavement. Whatever it be, we say, "This is my cross; I must bear it patiently."

Surely it is a noble application of the saying of Christ—noble, if it reminds us that we, like Him, are to be made perfect through suffering;* noble, if it is used as an expression of the truth, that whatever pain or trouble comes to us, it is sent by the loving Father; noble, if it prompts us, as we pass through the vale of misery, to use it for a well.†

But noble as it really is thus to apply the Saviour's words, let us remember that after all it is not the way in which He intended them to be applied. These troubles and afflictions of life are analogous to the cross of Christ only in their pain, in the anguish which they cause. But in all else, in all that distinguishes His suffering, and gives it a unique character, they differ from it more than they resemble it.

For, if it be true, as the Christian must believe, that all which he has to endure is sent by *God*, it is no less true that the cross of Christ was laid upon Him to carry by the hands of wicked *men*. And if

* Heb. ii. 10. † Psalm lxxxiv. 6 (Prayer Book Version).

it be true, as we all know that it is, that the pain of life cannot be refused by us, however unwilling we may be to bear it, then that was emphatically *not* true of the Saviour's cross. Of His own will He bore it for our sakes. He laid down His life for the sheep—it was a voluntary sacrifice. "I have power," He says, "to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."* The cross of Christ was a voluntary burden, and it was borne for others.

So must it be, brethren, with that cross which every one of us must bear, if we are really to follow Christ, if we are to be worthy to bear His name. It is not sickness or suffering, which we cannot help; but a voluntary choice. It is not endurance, ending only in ourselves; but something suffered for the sake of others.

For every one of us will come the time—nay, it comes to us every day—when two ways open out before us, the one leading to pleasure, ease, and comfort—joy, it may be, of the highest and purest kind; the other painful and hard to travel. The choice is open to us; our will is absolutely free; but our very Christianity is staked on the issue. For the one brings pleasure to ourselves; the other will enable us to do good to others. If we walk in that path which is toilsome and grievous, we sacrifice self to others; we take up our cross, and follow Christ. If we choose the other, we are no true disciples of His.

Let this, then, be our Lenten Prayer:—

Help me, Lord Jesus, to find my cross.

Keep me, Lord, against that day when Thou shalt

* John x. 18.

come again, that it may not fall to me to hear the rebuke—Thou hast borne no cross ; thou art no true disciple of Mine ; thou art not worthy of Me.

Help me, Thou Saviour of the world, Who, by Thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed me, finding my cross day by day, to bear it willingly, gladly, for Thy sake—seeking not mine own will, but the will of the Father in heaven—and so to follow Thee.

VIII.

GOOD FRIDAY CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION.*

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."—1 Cor xi. 26.

It will be granted that no movement which can in any sense of the word be described as great, no movement which succeeds in bringing within its influence large numbers of men, has for its result either unmixed good or unmixed evil. If this holds of other religious revivals, it certainly holds no less of the Tractarian Movement which began at Oxford half a century ago. For many of the changes which it has brought about in the Church of England, and in a less degree in our own Church, we have every reason to be thankful; though perhaps it is not too much to say that no single thoughtful Churchman will maintain that it has been productive of nothing but spiritual gain.

Among the characteristics of Church life in the present generation which are certainly in some measure due to the Oxford revival, and for which it deserves our gratitude, is the prominent place

* Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, Good Friday, 1899.

assigned in thought and practice to the Holy Communion. It is perhaps a matter of surprise, to those who learn it for the first time, that even in the parishes of the great High Church theologians of the time of Charles II, the Holy Communion was in many cases celebrated not more than three or four times in a year—at the most once a month ; and that on these rare occasions the number of communicants was not great.* It is no less noteworthy, and it is an index of the state of feeling on these matters in the Church of England a century ago, that in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, on Easter Day, 1800, there were no more than half a dozen communicants.†

We have changed all that. Communions at least once a month are universal. In most churches there is a weekly, in many a daily, Eucharist. And, in spite of the greater frequency of celebration, the average number of communicants at each service does not seem to have diminished. All this, or most of it, is assuredly gain. But the greater the prominence given to the Holy Communion, the more it comes to be regarded as the normal centre of Christian worship on Sundays and holy days, the more striking becomes the fact that in scarcely any of our churches—and I speak more of those that have come under the influence of the Oxford Movement than of others—is there an administration of the Sacrament on Good Friday. In earlier days such

* Scudamore, *Notitia Eucharistica*, 2nd ed., pp. 829, 835. Robertson, *How shall we Conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England?* 3rd ed. (1869), pp. 209-211.

† Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 1896, p. 454.

an omission was easily accounted for. When the Holy Communion was only celebrated three or four times a year, of which, of course, Easter Day was always one, it was not to be expected that a week-day only distant two days from Easter, however solemn the associations which clustered round it, would be chosen as a Communion day. Good Friday was not likely to fare better, in those days of laxity, than Ascension Day. But no such explanation can be offered now. That there shall be no celebration on Good Friday is made almost a test of Churchmanship. It is a fact that in many Anglican churches on Good Friday and Easter Even the altar is laid bare; that in some on those days only throughout the whole year it is unused for its proper purpose.

The result is peculiar. We need not wonder if it perplexes the lay mind. We single out one day of the year for the commemoration of the death of Christ, and on that day alone we forbid His death to be commemorated in the way which He has appointed. Surely there is some incongruity between our practice and the words penned by St. Paul, if not spoken by the Lord Himself, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

And let it be remarked that this placing of Good Friday among the non-Eucharistic days is a distinct departure from the tradition of the Reformed Church of England, so far as it can now be ascertained. It is at least significant that the Book of Common Prayer provides an Epistle and Gospel for the day,

and that without any indication that this day differs from others for which such provision is made. It is impossible to suppose that this silence implies the continuance of the mediaeval practice. The mediaeval practice *could* not be continued in the Reformed Church ; for, according to it, the priest alone communicated on Good Friday,* and he communicated, without celebration, by means of the reserved Sacrament. Nothing could be more contrary to the principles for which the Reformers strove. It seems quite clear that the compilers of our Prayer Book intended that Good Friday, like every other day for which there is a special Epistle and Gospel, should be honoured with a celebration of the Holy Communion.†

And so it was understood by at least one great divine of the early part of the seventeenth century, the strength of whose churchmanship has never been questioned. In the collected works of Bishop Andrewes we find three Good Friday Sermons, and in one of them he refers to the Communion which was to

* In the tenth century the Leofric Missal, used at Exeter, enjoined the communion of the laity. But, so far as I know, according to all later books, except the York Missal, the priest alone communicates. In the York rite the laity are *permitted* to do so : though it seems unlikely that they often used the privilege. Two passages from sixteenth-century writings have been quoted by Mr. Frost (*Good Friday and Easter Eve Communion*, 1893, p. 42, f.) as evidence of the communion of the English laity on Good Friday in the period immediately preceding the Reformation. But he relies on an imperfect translation of one of them, and he seems to me to misinterpret both.

† The First Prayer Book of Edward VI has an explicit direction to this effect. Robertson, *ut sup.*, p. 213.

follow.* The allusion is of peculiar interest, for the sermon was preached before the Queen at Whitehall exactly three centuries ago. It establishes beyond question the usage of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel; and Queen Elizabeth was no Puritan.

No more was Robert Nelson, the non-juror, a century later. But in the chapel which Nelson attended in London the Eucharist was celebrated, not only on all Sundays, but also on solemn days, including Good Friday.† The Chapel Royal in the reign of Elizabeth, and the Chapel of Robert Nelson in Great Ormond Street, did not stand alone. When more frequent Communion became the rule of the English Church, Good Friday was included among the days on which it was administered; in some places the Good Friday Communion was even more largely attended than that of Easter Day.‡

It is natural that we should inquire how it has happened that in these later days that has come to

* *Sermons* (Anglo-Catholic Library), vol. ii. p. 120. "This day, I say, which is dedicated to none other end, but even to lift up the Son of Man, as Moses did the serpent in the wilderness, that we may look upon Him, and live, ... when in the memorial of the Holy Sacrament 'His death is showed forth until He come.'" The passage is extracted from the first of the three Good Friday Sermons, which was "preached at the court, on the 25th of March, A.D. 1597, being Good Friday." See also p. 134.

† *Life in the English Church* (*1660-1714*), by J. H. Overton, p. 168. Another famous non-juror, like-minded with Nelson, John Kettlewell, celebrated the Eucharist on Good Friday. Robertson, *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

‡ In a little village near Leeds we hear of "above a hundred communicants on Good Friday, and *near as many* on the following Easter Day."—Overton, *Op. cit.*, 169, quoting from Thoresby's *Diary*, April 3, 1713. This and other references I owe to the Bishop of Edinburgh.

be regarded as unseemly which is so plainly in harmony with the mind of the English Church, as expressed in her Formularies, and as exemplified in the practice of her most eminent sons. The answer which is most easily given, the answer which I have no doubt would be given by many who, in the name of Churchmanship, look askance at Good Friday celebrations, is, that we have here a return to Catholic usage. It is the answer usually given when questions are asked about deviations from the almost universal custom of the Anglican Communion. But it is an answer which in this case cannot be accepted as satisfactory. There is absolutely no proof, so far as I am aware, that in the earliest ages of the Church there was no Eucharistic Service on the day of the Lord's Passion; and any evidence which we possess bearing on the subject makes for the opposite conclusion. I lay no stress on the fact, though it cannot altogether be passed over, that in some regions of the East in the second century, the Passion and the Resurrection were commemorated on the same day.* It is impossible to suppose that that day was anywhere without its Eucharist. But, passing to the West, where customs more analogous to our own prevailed, we are confronted at once with the witness of Tertullian. In his treatise on Prayer he gives an interesting list of what he calls "empty observances,"† most of which he appears to regard as quite of recent origin.

* Salmon, *Introduction to New Testament*, ed. 4, p. 270.

† *De Oratione*, 15, Wissowa's Edition (Vienna Corpus), i, p. 189: "Sed quoniam unum aliquid attigimus uacuae observationis, non pigebit cetera quoque denotare."

Among the rest he mentions two which had to do with days of fasting. "Many," he tells us, "withhold the kiss of peace from their brethren on such days." This custom he disapproves, making, however, a special exception of the great public fast "on the day of the Passover," by which he can mean nothing else than Good Friday. The other practice which he immediately proceeds to condemn, no less strongly, and without reservation of exceptional cases, is that of non-attendance at the Eucharist on the station days, the Wednesday and Friday of every week. In this connexion he has no saving clause as to Good Friday, and his reasoning applies to it as forcibly as to any other day of abstinence. "On the days of the stations," he says, "most people think that they should not be present at the prayers of the sacrifices, because the station would be broken if the Lord's Body were received." "Will not your station," he asks, "be more solemn if you have in addition taken up your station at the altar of God?"* The words of Tertullian prove that a large party in the Church had already come to imagine

* *De Oratione*, 18, f. (i, p. 191, f.): "Alia iam consuetudo inualuit: ieiunantes habita oratione cum fratribus subtrahunt osculum pacis, quod est signaculum orationis. Quando autem magis conferenda cum fratribus pax est nisi," etc. . . . . "ubicunque autem alibi operationem tuam abscondere potes, debes meminisse praecepti; ita et disciplinae foris et consuetudini domi satisfacies. Sic et die paschae, quo communis et quasi publica ieiunii religio est, merito deponimus osculum. . . . . Similiter et de stationum diebus non putant plerique sacrificiorum orationibus interueniendum, quod statio soluenda sit accepto corpore Domini. Ergo deuotum Deo obsequium eucharistia resoluit an magis Deo obligat? Nonne sollemnior erit statio tua, si et ad aram Dei steteris?"

that there was some inconsistency between a day of fasting and communion—a party so large that, unlike himself, he proposes a compromise: that they should *receive* the Body of Christ, but reserve it to be eaten at home when the fast was over.* But if Tertullian gives us this information, he informs us no less clearly of another fact, that the Eucharist was celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays, and among them, since he makes no exception, on the Friday before Easter.

It seems that in time the scruples of those whom Tertullian opposed carried the day. Some two centuries later, we learn from a letter, sometimes attributed to Pope Innocent I, that at Rome no sacraments were celebrated on the two days preceding Easter.† The Roman custom at the present day is so far in accordance with that of the fifth century that no Mass is said on Good Friday. To Rome and not to primitive or Catholic practice we must go if we desire to learn the origin of the ban so widely set in our day on Good Friday Communion. But when we copy Rome, it is desirable to imitate, and not to parody. The Roman custom of a few centuries ago, if not the practice of to-day, was preferable to that of its High Anglican admirers. For Christian instinct, whether in the East or the West, was not content for ever to be deprived of the

* "Accepto corpore Domini et reseruato utrumque saluum est, et participatio sacrificii et executio officii."

† The Epistle to Decentius, Bishop of Eugubium (Migne, *P. L.* xx. 555): "Quod utique non dubium est, in tantum eos ieiunasse biduo memorato, ut traditio ecclesiae habeat, isto biduo sacramenta penitus non celebrari."

Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ on the day to which above all others it seemed most appropriate. And so arose the so-called Mass of the Pre-sanctified. From the Mass celebrated on Maundy Thursday the Sacrament was reserved; and on the reserved elements the people communicated on the following day.* Thus there was no celebration; but there was Communion: "By eating this bread, and drinking this cup, they did show the Lord's death." The Mass of the Pre-sanctified still remains in East and West.† It is no longer in the Roman Church a Communion of the people. The priest alone receives.‡ But the principle is admitted. The death of Christ is commemorated, as it should be, by partaking of His Body and Blood in the way which He has ordained. The Anglican Communion is the only one in Christendom which is so intensely Catholic, in practice if not in theory, as to place an interdict on her children on Good Friday. It is surely time that we put ourselves into line with the other Churches throughout the world; that we remember the teaching of our own Prayer Book, and follow the example of our fathers in the reformed faith; that we begin again on the day sacred to the memory of the Passion of Christ to partake of the Sacrament of His Body and

* So *Ordo Romanus Primus* (Mabillon, *Musaeum Italicum*, Paris, 1724, vol ii, p. 24), "Communicant *omnes* in silentio."

† For the custom of the Eastern Church see Neale's *History*, General Introduction, vol. ii, p. 713. It has been stated, however, that Neale does not report the facts correctly. *Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*, July 21, 1899, p. 581.

‡ See the final rubrics of the Missal in the office of the Feria vi, in Parasceue.

Blood. And there is only one way in which this can be done, consistently with that measure of loyalty which is still thought to be due on the part of Churchmen to the Prayer Book. Not Communion only, as in Rome and the East, but the entire celebration of the Holy Communion on Good Friday, must be restored.

To such a restoration I can conceive only one real objection. It is that which Tertullian hints* was urged by many in his day, which has been repeatedly urged in later times. Good Friday, it is said, is a day of sadness and gloom. Its special purpose is to gather us round the Cross, and enable us to gaze upon, and to realise, the anguish and suffering of the Incarnate God. But the Eucharist is, as its name betokens, above all things, a service of praise and thanksgiving; it is inconsistent with true sympathy with the Passion of Christ. And it is, no doubt, in accordance with this principle that in recent times it has become more and more the fashion to banish every symbol of joy from our churches on this day; to make our services increasingly gloomy; to adopt such modern devotions as the Three Hours' Service, and many another, nearly as modern and nearly as realistic; while the Eucharist is banished to Easter Day.

To treat Good Friday in this way is surely to deal with it as it should not be dealt with. It is by no

* After the sentences quoted above he proceeds: "Si statio de militari exemplo nomen accepit (nam et militia Dei sumus), utique nulla laetitia sine tristitia obueniens castris stationes militum rescindit. Nam laetitia libentius, tristitia sollicitius administrabit disciplinam."

means merely as a matter of ritual that one raises one's voice in protest against such a way of observing so solemn a day. Ritual is, for the most part, little more than archæology, in this case perhaps very bad archæology; and archæology, good or bad, is not religion. But thus to impress Good Friday with the character of gloom seems to indicate a serious misconception of the religious meaning of the day, and may tend to obscure the import of the event which it recalls to our minds. It may be dramatic to display all the emblems of woe on this day, and to replace them two days later with outbursts of praise on Easter Day. But just so far as it is dramatic it is unreal, and, from the Christian point of view, unmeaning. It is impossible for the Christian to contemplate Good Friday apart from Easter, or Easter apart from Good Friday. To attempt on Good Friday to mourn over the death of Christ, as though His death were not the beginning of the triumph over death, as though the burial in the tomb of Joseph were not to be followed by the glory of the Resurrection, is to attempt that which has been beyond the reach of any Christian, since the day on which the first disciples saw in the lifeless Jesus the end of all their hopes. To concentrate our thoughts on the sufferings of the Lord, without allowing any gleam of thankfulness to enlighten our hearts, is to degrade the death of Christ to the level of a martyrdom, and the martyrdom, let us add, of one whose mission has failed. And it is to forget the true character of Christian joy and Christian sorrow. These two are so closely connected together

that they cannot be separated. The highest Christian happiness, and the highest Christian praise, is the happiness of union with God, and the praise which this union naturally calls forth ; but union with God means victory over sin, and victory over sin is purchased by the precious blood of Christ. In the ecstasy of thanksgiving we are brought face to face with our own sin, with the Atonement, with the Agony and Bloody Sweat, with the Cross and Passion of Christ: "As often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we do show the Lord's *death* till He come."

And if all Christian rejoicing is thus mingled with sorrow, it is no less true that the deepest Christian sorrow must have its element of praise and thanksgiving. The agony of the penitent leads him to the Cross to gaze upon the shame and the suffering of his Lord ; but he remembers that by the Cross he is reconciled to God, that by the blood of Christ he is cleansed from sin, and gains the victory ; and he speaks with accents not only of confession, but of praise.

Good Friday is the saddest anniversary of the Christian year ; but its sadness is not unmixed with thanksgiving ; and thanksgiving finds its fittest expression in the Christian Eucharist. "Consider," says Bishop Andrewes,* "that this day, to Him the day of the fierceness of God's wrath, is to us the day of the fulness of God's favour, as the Apostle calleth it, 'a day of salvation.' In respect of that He suffered, I deny not, an evil day, a day of

* Second Good Friday Sermon, *Sermons*, ii, 153.

heaviness; but in respect of that which He by it hath obtained for us, it is, as we truly call it, a good day—a day of joy and jubilee. For it doth not only rid us of that wrath which pertaineth to us for our sins; but farther, it maketh that pertain to us whereto we had no manner of right at all."

Is it not legitimate that we should crave, on this day of joy and jubilee, to show the Lord's death in truest thankfulness by eating the bread and drinking the wine of His appointment?

This at least is certain. The very same condition of heart and mind which is needed for a worthy participation in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, is that which also fits us for entering with true sympathy into the services of this day. Deep consciousness of sin, sincere repentance for those misdeeds of ours which have caused the Lord of Glory to hang upon the cross of shame, humble thankfulness for that all-sufficient Sacrifice; these things we must have, if by means of the Holy Communion we are to be one with Christ and Christ with us, if we are to dwell in Christ and Christ in us. These things, too, enable us to-day, in the true Christian spirit of mingled grief and joy, to gaze upon the Crucified, who died that we might be saved from death, who lives that we may live in Him.

IX.

THE DOUBT OF ST. THOMAS.*

The words of St. Thomas: "*I will not believe.*"—St. John xx. 25.
"And Thomas answered and said unto Him, *My Lord and my God.*"
—St. John xx. 28.

There are, I suppose, few ministers to whose lot it has fallen to occupy the pulpit on one of the greater days of the Christian year who have not felt the utter inadequacy of all mere preaching to such occasions. Every part of our services to-day—the psalms we have sung, the chapters which have been read, the prayers which we have joined in using—the joys, the hopes, the aspirations of our hearts—speak to us all more eloquently than any sermon.

And then, too, how trite, how commonplace, is every subject on which at a time like this it is possible to speak. The open tomb of Jesus, the glad tidings, "He is not here, He is risen," these fill our hearts and minds. And the message is itself so grand, and yet so simple, that we seem to spoil it if we preach about it. If we wander from the one great theme, we strike a discordant note. If we dwell upon it, what can we say that is not far better said in the old familiar story of the Gospels?

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Easter, 1896.

And yet, dear friends, the duty is laid upon me to-night of trying to help you and to help myself to learn some fresh lesson from the message of Easter Day—"The Lord is risen, indeed." I think I shall do so best by asking you to think of one who seems to be the very type and pattern of many who hear that message to-day; one who, when he heard, believed not; nay, refused to believe.

Everyone knows the story of the doubting Apostle Thomas. You remember how his fellow-disciples told him on that first Easter Day, long centuries ago, the glad tidings, "We have seen the Lord." And you remember, too, the cold, unsympathetic answer which might have served, if anything could, to rob them of their joy—"Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

It was vain to tell him that *they* had seen, that *they* had handled. "Except *I* shall see, I will not believe." Why was Thomas so hard to convince? Why did he doubt more than his fellows? You will say perhaps that he was a man of desponding character; that he naturally looked at things from their least hopeful side; that he felt the news was too good to be true; and that so he could not believe it. Yes. But what *made* him so desponding, so depressed? What made him so obstinately refuse all comfort—so persistently take a gloomy, despairing view of all that was taking place? I think we can see the reason for it. As we collect together the few notices of St. Thomas in the Gospel story, there is one thing

which stands out unmistakably in them all. He was possessed of a strong imaginative power.* He did not believe in the superficial way in which many men believe. He did not merely accept the truth; his imagination helped him, forced him, to see it in all its consequences, caused him to perceive all that was wrapped up and implied in it. He realised what was meant by the beliefs of other men better than they did themselves. It was so with the Death of Jesus; it was so also with His Resurrection.

St. Thomas grasped more than his fellow-apostles all the awful import of the fact, which no one could deny, that Jesus *was dead*. Oh, how every detail of that cruel passion had eaten into his soul! The poor emaciated body had been taken lifeless from the cross, and Thomas had gazed on the mangled hands and feet, on the pierced side, on the blood-stained brow. And how the sight dwelt on his mind! The very moment the Lord is named, he thinks of the print of the nails, of the gash of the soldier's spear.† Yes! the dear Friend, for Whom he would gladly have given his own life,‡ was dead: all that he held most dear was laid in the tomb of Joseph.

But was it only the death of a dear friend? Thomas saw that it was far more than that. It was the shattering of his life-hope. If Jesus had been indeed the Messiah, as they had all believed Him to be, how could He have died?§ How, above all, could He have died the death of shame? Where

* John xi. 16; xiv. 5. † John xx. 25. ‡ John xi. 16.
§ John xii. 34. Compare *Enoch* 49.

now was the kingdom which God was to restore to Israel?* Where *now* was the King who was to divide the people as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats?† What of the Son of Man, who was to come in the clouds of heaven?‡ Jesus was dead. Their hopes were dead with Him. It was too horrible. No wonder if St. Thomas became dejected—no wonder if he despaired—no wonder if he wandered off by himself, and forsook the company of his fellow-disciples, separated from them by the utter misery of his own grief. *They* might not realise that all their hope was gone, but he did. They might have some vague expectation that God would revive their little society; and so they might meet together, perhaps for prayer, perhaps to celebrate the Holy Communion, as the Lord had commanded. But he could not be present with them. He knew—he thought he knew—that there was no remedy. He knew that a dead Christ was of as little avail as no Christ at all. The death of Jesus was for him so utterly real, so utterly overwhelming, was it any wonder that he could not bring himself, without the strongest proof, to believe that the crushing blow was averted, that Jesus had overcome death?

But it was not only, or even chiefly, because he realised the Death of Jesus more than others that St. Thomas found it hard to accept the truth of His Resurrection. His main difficulty lay in the fact that he perceived in the Resurrection itself a greater

* Acts i. 6. † Matt. xxv. 31-33. Compare *Enoch* 62.
‡ Matt. xxiv. 30, 31; xxvi. 64. Compare Matt. xvi. 27.

fulness of meaning than it bore to his fellow-apostles. To them, indeed, it was, I suppose, the most joyful event that had ever happened. That Friend who had been the companion and guide of their lives, and who had been taken from them by a cruel death, had returned again from the grave. No wonder they rejoiced. No wonder if their very happiness made them afraid: "they departed from the sepulchre *with fear* and great joy."* No wonder if their happiness made it hard for them to believe. "While they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye any meat? . . . . And He took it, and did eat before them."† It was meet that they should make merry and be glad; for their Master had died, and was alive again: He had been lost, and was found.

This was what the Resurrection meant for them. For St. Thomas it was something far greater. It embraced within itself consequences more far-reaching than they had even conceived. Let us see what they were.

Once more the eleven were gathered together on the first day of the week. This time the doubter was with them. Friendship, I suppose, and tender regard induced him once more to join their company, though a wide chasm of difference had opened up between them during that week which had passed since the Resurrection Day. Perhaps he had not given up all hope, perhaps, although he had avowed his unbelief, he was nearer than he thought to receiving the great fact to which they bore witness.

* Matt. xxviii. 8. † Luke xxiv. 41, 43.

And there, in the assembly of the Church, that was to happen which, in one moment, was to carry him from doubt to truest faith.

"After eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you."* The old familiar face, the old familiar voice, the old familiar words. Already, perchance, the unbelief of Thomas was crumbling away under the influence of the presence of Jesus Christ. But Jesus will offer him the proof which he himself demanded. "Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." But the offered proof was not accepted; it was not needed. The finger was not stretched forth; the hand remained by the apostle's side. The evidence of *touch* had been asked; the *sight* of Christ was enough. At once Thomas professed his faith in the risen Lord. He cried out, "My Lord and my God."†

Surely, there is here something not without parallel in the history of many an earnest unbeliever of our own day. Such and such an article of the faith is hard, almost impossible, to receive. It needs strong, overwhelming proof. We measure beforehand—how can we help it?—the evidence which will convince us of its truth. And yet the day comes when it is our belief, and that on evidence far less than we had demanded, far different perhaps from that which we had conceived. Those to whom difficulties of belief are a reality need not despair. Only let us be earnest,

* John xx. 26. † John xx. 27, 28, with Westcott's note.

only let our mind be open to accept the proof when God sends it, and one day it shall come, if not here, at least hereafter—and it may come in a degree and in a form which would not bring conviction now.

And then notice the way in which St. Thomas *expresses* his new-found faith. It burst upon him in a moment; but in that moment he had won a faith truer, wider, deeper, richer than those that had believed before him. For were not those strange words in which to say that he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead?—"My Lord and my God." To the rest Jesus risen was the Friend, the Teacher, returned.* To Thomas He was the risen God. Which of those who had seen Christ on the first Easter Day had greeted him as Lord and God? Not one. Thomas, the incredulous, the sceptic, the unbeliever—*he* it was who first clearly grasped the truth, which St. Paul stated long afterwards, that Jesus Christ was "marked off† as the Son of God by the resurrection of the dead." He saw, and he was the first to see, that the Man who died, who was buried, and the third day rose again, could be no mere Man, no mere Messiah, no mere Prince or Teacher, but "Very God of very God, of one substance with the Father; by Whom all things were made."

Yes, the Resurrection meant far more for Thomas than for the rest. He saw, as no other saw, all that was involved in it; all that followed from it. That was why he needed such strong proof to convince him that it had taken place. Could he indeed believe that that Galilean Carpenter, that Friend

* Compare John xx. 16.

† ὁρισθέντος, Rom. i. 4. Dean Vaughan renders "defined."

whom he knew so well, and loved so dearly, was really God? That was doubtless the main difficulty which caused his unbelief. But this very difficulty, when once it was overcome, became the glory of his faith. It was just because he had pondered the matter well beforehand; just because that realistic imagination of his had led him to understand that if Christ rose, Christ was God; just because he felt the awful significance of the Resurrection of Jesus, and would not believe it on any evidence not sufficient to bear the strain laid upon it—it was just because of all this that the very moment Thomas became a believer, he believed so much. It was just because of this that, in one instant, he grasped, once and for all, the highest truth of the Catholic Creed—Jesus, my Lord and my God. It was the dark night of doubt through which he had passed that made the day dawn so brightly for him. His unbelief, his despondency made him at last all the truer and nobler in his faith.

If I have succeeded in tracing correctly the story of the doubt of Thomas, and of the triumph of his faith, it must be evident that he is the type of many among ourselves. He passed through a struggle which, in these days, few educated and intelligent men can avoid. "The majority of mankind," said the late Professor Mozley, in words that have been often quoted—"the majority of mankind perhaps owe their belief rather to the outward influence of custom and education than to any strong principle of faith within; and it is to be feared that many, if they came to perceive how wonderful what they believed was,

would not find their belief so easy and so matter-of-course a thing as they appear to find it. Custom throws a film over the great facts of religion, and interposes a veil between the mind and truth, which, by preventing wonder, intercepts doubt too, and at the same time excludes from deep belief, and protects from disbelief. But deeper faith and disbelief throw off in common the dependence on mere custom, draw aside the interposing veil, place themselves face to face with the contents of the past, and expose themselves alike to the ordeal of wonder."* Thomas was one of the minority who look facts in the face. His imaginative power exposed him to "the ordeal of wonder." He attained a deeper faith than his fellows, because, unlike them, he had passed, by a very necessity of his nature, through the vale of the misery of unbelief.

Have I interpreted the record aright? I know of but one part of the narrative which might incline us to a different view of its import. It is that of which we are told in the words which follow the text. Thomas has professed his faith; and the Lord says to him: "Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."† Is there not here, it will be said, a rebuke, albeit a gentle rebuke, of the doubter? Is there not a contrast drawn between him and his fellow-apostles? Do not they receive the higher praise who had been less exacting in their demand for evidence? Or, to go a step further, is it not a fact that a blessing is

* *Lectures on Miracles*, 7th edition, p. 3. † John xx. 29.

promised to those who believe much with little warrant? Is not credulity preferred to a reasoned faith?

It is hard, indeed, to think so. It is hard to conceive that He who claimed to be the Truth would lay down a principle which seems to sap the very foundations of all morality in intellectual things. And the more we ponder the words of Christ, the greater our difficulty becomes. If He suggested a contrast between Thomas and the rest of those who who were gathered with Him in the upper room, because Thomas believed on the evidence of sight, and they on less than sight, He suggested a contrast which did not, in fact, exist. All alike had seen, and not till they had seen did any of them believe. "He showed unto them His hands and His side," says St. John.* When the Lord appeared among them, St. Luke tells us,† "they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled, and why do doubts‡ arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having." Thomas received no more than they received when "He showed them His hands and His feet." Nay, they asked more proof than he, and it was not denied them. "While they still disbelieved for joy, . . . He took a piece of a broiled fish, and did eat before them." Then, at length, and only then, did their faith overcome doubt.

Between Thomas and the rest there was, no doubt,

* John xx. 20. † Luke xxiv. 37-43. ‡ διαλογισμοί.

a contrast ; a contrast in temperament, a contrast in the utter hopelessness of doubt ; a contrast, too, in the ultimate depth of belief ; but in the evidence on which faith was founded, no contrast at all.

There seems to be but one way out of our perplexity. If we shrink from making Christ say what is immoral, if we will not understand His words in a sense which is inconsistent with the narrative that precedes them, if we are unwilling to dislocate the whole story, we must lay aside altogether the notion that the Lord describes the case of Thomas as fundamentally different from that of the ten. He does not separate him from them. Rather He identifies him with them, because now for the first time it is possible to do so. Thomas, the last to believe, is for the moment the representative of those who have believed before him. In addressing him, Christ addresses them. It is as though through him He said to all, You through sight have attained to faith ; faith none the less real, none the less true, because the road that led to it has passed through sight. Now you know by experience the blessing which faith brings with it. But do not dream that this blessing is your peculiar possession. Many have believed, many will believe, for whom sight is an impossibility. The blessing shall be theirs also. For the blessing belongs not to sight, but to the faith which springs from it, and passes beyond it. Blessed are they, therefore, which have not seen, and yet have believed.

Surely it is an aphorism which is verified every day. How blessed is the faith even of those simple souls to whom it has never occurred to doubt, to whom

disbelief seems inconceivable; blessed because it invests life with a meaning and a purpose which otherwise it could not have; because it supplies a motive for holiness which nothing else can give; because it "overcomes the world."* But if such a faith as this is blessed, how much greater is the blessing of those who know what evidence means, and must have it before they believe; who will not impose upon themselves or others by pretending to accept what they do not and cannot believe; for whom, therefore, faith follows upon doubt, and suspense, and conflict! For them faith, long delayed though it be, is, when it comes, a richer possession: it is stronger, deeper, more real; it brings a hope and a peace, the nature of which is but more clearly understood by contrast with the uncertainty and the conflict that have passed.

* 1 John v. 4.

X.

THE LIFTING UP OF CHRIST.*

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."
—St. John xii. 32.

I suppose it will have been observed by many of us that the very same passages of Holy Scripture which were read in Holy Week as the Second Lessons at Matins and Evensong, are now once more selected for public use, this time as the Gospels at the Holy Communion. The fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John were then commended to us as the theme for our meditation, as we tried to follow the successive steps of the Passion of our Redeemer. And now again, after the Festival of Easter has brought to our minds a wholly different order of facts—while we wait for the Ascension of Christ into heaven, when we follow the infant Church through its week of expectation, when we rejoice in the memory of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost—extracts from those selfsame chapters give us the material for our thoughts. Is it not strange that the compilers of our Prayer Book should have made the same utterances of the Lord serve for purposes so entirely different?

And yet one might venture to say that no one has

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Fifth Sunday after Easter, 1897.

ever regarded these chapters as an unhappy selection, as inappropriate, at either season. When our thoughts are centred on the sufferings of Christ in the week before His death, how better can we be employed than in listening to the words which He spoke when His sufferings were about to attain their climax in the garden of Gethsemane? And now, when the glorious victory of Easter Day approaches its consummation, in the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost, what can we do more fitly than hear such sayings as these, and seek to learn the depth and fulness of their meaning: "A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father;"* and, "I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you;"† and, once more, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father;"‡ and this, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth"? §

But it is lawful, nay, it is necessary, if we would grasp at all the meaning of these sayings of the Lord, to go one step further. How came it, we ask, that on the very eve of His Crucifixion Christ spoke words which so evidently refer, not to His death at all, but to that which was to follow the rising from the tomb? How came it that in all the discourses of Holy Week, He spoke as if already the Church were

* John xvi. 16. † John xvi. 7.
‡ John xvi. 28. § John xiv. 16.

passing through the great Forty Days, as if there lay in the immediate future not the Agony and the Cross, but the Ascension to Glory, and the Mission of the Spirit?

The answer is to be found in the view which St. John took, which in these chapters he represents our Lord Himself to have taken, of that great series of events which began with Good Friday, and ended with Pentecost. By us the drama which was enacted in those memorable days is not unnaturally conceived as divided into two acts by the silence of the garden-tomb. We think of the suffering and anguish of the Cross, closed by death: and then we pause. On Easter Day the glorification of the Christ begins; we watch Him as He rises from the grave, as He moves about among His disciples in His resurrection body, as He returns to the throne of the Father, as He pours out the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the infant Church—Christ suffering on Good Friday, Christ triumphant from Easter onwards.

But to Christ and His evangelist these things wore a different aspect. They were one continuous, unbroken whole. They were but successive events in the withdrawal of Christ—the withdrawal begun with the death on the Cross, scarcely interrupted by the intermittent appearances after the Resurrection, completed on the Ascension Day, permanently provided for on Whitsunday. They were steps in the glorification of Christ, commenced already when He was lifted up on the Cross of Calvary, finally achieved when He rose from the Mount of Olives to take His place by the Father's side, far above all principalities

and powers, and every name that is named. And it was just because the Lord conceived these things in their *unity* that He used language in Holy Week which to us might have seemed to belong to a later time. It was because the Crucifixion was but the beginning of that which was to be completed seven weeks later, that His discourses in the upper room dealt mainly with His dwelling with the Father, and with His Gift to the Church.

Now, our text does not come into the chapters of which I have been speaking. But we shall find that the principle which they reveal to us, and which is the key to their meaning, is illustrated in it also, and enables us in some measure at least to understand its purport.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." What is this "lifting up" of which He speaks? I dare say, if the question were put, many would answer at once, His lifting up upon the Cross. And, no doubt, this was in His mind, for St. John tells us in the next verse, "This He said, signifying what death He should die." But the allusion to Golgotha does not exhaust the thought. The very words themselves imply a more comprehensive reference. More exactly rendered, they would run: "And I, if I be lifted up *out of* the earth." The Saviour views Himself laid in the tomb, in the stillness of death: but then comes the awakening; He is lifted up *out of* the earth, henceforth to be seated in the glory of the Father. There is present before Him as He speaks that whole series of events of which I have spoken. But if any

one is singled out from the rest, and made more prominent, it is not the death on the cross, but the resurrection from the tomb. When He speaks of being lifted up in order to draw all men to Him, He is but applying the words which He had used of Himself a little before: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*" Calvary and the grave were but the necessary preliminary to the new resurrection life. As the seed died in order that it might spring up and bear fruit, so did He die in order that He might be lifted up, and draw all men to Himself.

Here, then, is the first essential for grasping the meaning of our text—to remember in what sense our Lord speaks of His *lifting up*. But there is another. We must remember also the event which called forth the words. It was a most momentous occasion. "Certain Greeks," we are told, "came to Philip, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus."† Who these Greeks were we can never know. All that we can say with certainty—all, indeed, that just now concerns us—is that they belonged to that great outside world with which the Jew of Palestine had so little intercourse. It was one of the few occasions, and by no means the least remarkable, on which the ministry of Christ extended itself beyond the lost sheep of the house of Israel. These men came to Him as the representatives of the Gentile nations, just as in the days of His infancy the wise men had come to do homage to

* John xii. 24. † John xii. 20, 21.

Him in the name of heathen learning and philosophy. And when He saw these strangers before Him, seeking to know more of Him and of His teaching, the heart of Jesus was stirred to its depths. *Then* it was that He said, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified."* *Then* it was that, knowing all that was to come to pass in the future, He cried, "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw *all men* unto me." Do we not see at once what emphasis we must place on the words "all men"? It was His most distinct declaration of the world-wide mission of His Church. When He was lifted up, when He was seated at the right hand of God, and had sent forth the other Comforter who was to be with His disciples for ever, then the message of the Gospel would no more be confined to men of Israelitish race; Greeks as well as Hebrews would have their share in its blessings. The Church would be no mere sect of Judaism; it would welcome Jew and Gentile alike within it; the lifting up of Christ in glory would stamp it for ever as the all-embracing, the Catholic Church of God.

If that be the meaning of the saying of Christ recorded in our text, I suppose it is no more than the simple truth to say that history tells us His prediction was fulfilled to the very letter. Try to conceive the Church as it was when the ministry of the Master was over. A few hundred men and women, without learning and without culture, reared in the narrowest training-school that could be imagined—Galilean Judaism—with no higher ideal

* John xii. 23.

than to purify the Jewish faith, to raise and ennoble the Jewish people, how could they have thought anything grander than that to which the earthly life of the dear Master had been devoted? It is wonderful enough that these peasant preachers should have aimed so high. Yet, somehow or other—how, it matters not to us now—this little band of ignorant, narrow-minded Jews did conceive a nobler design; somehow or other, the thought came to them that the message was for the whole world; and so to nation after nation the Gospel was preached: the Ascension of Christ had not taken place thirty years when, in Rome itself, the very centre of the heathen world, a Church was founded, bearing His name. And what chance of success would those Jewish preachers have had in the Gentile world if their message had been exhausted when they had told of the life—the transcendentally beautiful and heroic life, no doubt—of a Jewish peasant who ended his days by a malefactor's death? Nay, let me put the question to you and to myself: What absorbing interest would the life of Jesus have for us if it had ended when He was laid in the tomb of Joseph? No; it was the power of His Resurrection that attracted men to Him, and attracts them still. It is because He rose from the dead, and conquered death, because He ever lives in the glory of the Eternal Father, because He was marked off as the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead,* because, therefore, we recognise in that life the life of God veiled in flesh, that we are attracted by its majesty; that it gains

* Rom. i. 4.

an importance for us absolutely unique. It is because He was lifted up that He draws us and all men to Himself.

But this is not all. So much history may tell us; but we know that the truth is greater still. We know that because of the lifting up of Christ a new force is at work in the hearts of men. The Lord Himself, because He has risen and ascended into the heavens, draws men to Him by the Holy Ghost, whom He has given to us. Man has no longer to fight the battle against sin single-handed. Christ by the Holy Ghost is working with us. Do we try sometimes to raise others to a higher and nobler life? Do we try to make them love Christ more and serve Him better? It is not we that do the work, but Christ Himself. We are but His feeble agents. He, by His Spirit, is working in the hearts of all, the careless, the worldly, the profligate, the sinful; striving with all, moving all to thoughts and deeds of holiness, stirring them up to surrender themselves soul and body to Him. The mission of the Church, the mission of us Christians, is tremendous and overwhelming; but, after all, it is not so much our mission as His. "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

XI.

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER.*

"Wait for the promise of the Father."—ACTS i. 4.

THE period of the Church year through which we are now passing, between Ascension Day and Whitsunday, has been known as Expectation Week, the week of waiting; and the name was, no doubt, given with allusion to the words which I have just read. For ten days after their Lord had ascended up into heaven the disciples waited at Jerusalem. Is it not strange that it was so? Some time during the Great Forty Days—perhaps it was on the Day of the Ascension itself—Christ had given them their commission: "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations;"† "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation."‡ And yet, with that great work before them, with a charge, the vastness of which they themselves can have but dimly conceived, they spent more than a week in apparent idleness, praising and blessing God in the Temple,§ gathering together in the upper room for Christian fellowship and worship,‖ but still

* Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, Evening of the Sunday after Ascension, 1899.

† Matt. xxviii. 19 (R.V.).

‡ Mark xvi. 15 (R.V.).

§ Luke xxiv. 53.

‖ Acts i. 13, 14.

making no beginning of their labours. Christ, who had commanded them to work, had commanded them also to wait. Why should they wait? they might have asked. Would not the enthusiasm of which they were full impel them irresistibly to be up and doing? The fields were white unto harvest. Surely it was their part to work while it was called day; the night would too soon come, when no man could work.* And yet they waited.

It is a parable of all life. Man is made to work. And yet how small a part of the life of any one of us is actually spent in occupations which make for the glory of God or the good of men. The days of childhood seem wasted time; in the years spent at school and college, we are but making preparation for our life-work. And when at length we enter upon it, how many hours are of necessity given up to rest and recreation. And then, in the end, if we live long enough, comes the time when far more is done for us by others than we can do for them in return, when the advance of age makes us once more idlers, when, if not useless, at least our energy and activity, our physical and mental power, begin to vanish away.

All this, if it be a riddle which we cannot solve, at least helps to impress upon us some of the teaching of Scripture as to the character of God. Man may be in haste, but God never is. He is a God of regularity and order: in His sight a thousand years are but as one day.† The days and years of preparation and of rest are no less important in His eyes

* John ix. 4. † 2 Pet. iii. 8.

than the hours of work. And if we are to be like Him, so must it be also with us. We must be as careful and as diligent in our preparation in this place for the work which is to follow in God's time, as we should be if the work itself were already entrusted to us—as if we were labouring in the sight of men, in the hurry and turmoil of life, seeing day by day, in some measure, the fruit of our toil.

Apply the same thought to things more directly spiritual, and we shall learn lessons of profit. God has placed His Church in the world to do His work—to bring men into communion with Himself. And as for a moment, now and then, we realise the greatness of the Church's mission, and compare it with what nineteen centuries of Christian effort—alas, intermittent effort—have achieved, are we not sometimes brought almost to despair? How feeble are our foreign missions! How few in our own Christian nation are, in any real sense of the phrase, disciples of Christ, learning from Him, and living for Him! What trifling headway the Church is making against false religions, against the degradation of sin! But we must not despair. The progress may be slow, but the result is assured, for it is the purpose of God. One day the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.* But meanwhile the purpose of God must be attained in God's way. We may long for results, we may repine because labourers are few, and because work seems ineffectual; but God is not in haste. He is slow and patient.

* Isaiah xi. 9.

As through countless ages He prepared the world for man—His greatest work—so through the slow march of centuries He advances to His final end. The work prospers as He sees fit. We must often be content to wait.

But, in another sense also, this Week of Expectation is a parable of life. For Christ gave His infant Church a reason for waiting. "Wait," He says, "for the promise of the Father." Their minds, as they heard His words, must have gone back to those wonderful discourses of His in the week of His Passion, and to the promises which He then connected with the Father. "I will pray the Father," He had said to them, "and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth; . . . He shall teach you all things."* And so it was for the coming of the Spirit of Truth they were to wait.

We know how they were rewarded for their waiting. We know how, when they were all gathered together, the sound of a rushing, mighty wind was heard; how the tongues of fire appeared, and, parting asunder, rested upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.† And we know how at once, when the Spirit descended, the work of the Church began. Men who had once been cowards became full of courage; men who had been always making mistakes became endued with wisdom for their mighty work. And so first at Jerusalem, then at Samaria, and then at length at Rome itself, under the guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost,

* John xiv. 16, 17, 26. † Acts ii. 1-4 (R.V.).

with enthusiasm and wisdom inspired by Him, the Gospel was preached, the Church spread and grew. Surely it was worth while to wait for such a Gift as this—a Gift, which not only made their work effectual, but which made it possible.

And yet, recognising the value of the Gift, I can well imagine that some of them might have said, Even for this why wait? For on the day of Pentecost itself their thoughts must have carried them back to a yet earlier day, the day of the Resurrection. They could not in seven weeks have forgotten how, on the first Easter Day, they were gathered together in the upper room; and how the Lord Himself appeared there in the midst of them, with the salutation, "Peace be unto you." They could not forget how, at that His first meeting with them after He had risen from the dead, He gave them their commission, and with it the Gift which was needed for its accomplishment. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."* What more could they need? The Holy Ghost once given, why should they receive the Gift again?

Perhaps some of you may be inclined to answer for them, that this first gift of the Spirit was *sui generis;* that the gift of the Spirit on Easter Day differed, both in its purpose and in its extent, from the outpouring of Pentecost. *This* was for the whole Church; *that* was for its ministers. It was to the twelve only that Christ said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

* John xx. 21, 22.

But was it really so? St. John, who records for us the memorable commission, and the not less memorable Gift, gives us no hint that the twelve alone were present. "The *disciples* were assembled," is his statement;* and when we turn to the parallel narrative of St. Luke, we find assurance that the apostles were not alone. When the brethren who had seen the Lord as they went to Emmaus, came with the joyful message of His resurrection, they found "the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them."† No. The assembly in the upper room was no mere gathering of ecclesiastical officials; it was an assembly of the whole Church. To the Church, as a society, Christ spoke; to the Church He gave His commission; on the Church was bestowed the authority to remit or to retain sins; on the Church He breathed; and to the Church He gave the Gift of the Spirit.

Why another outpouring of the same Spirit should be necessary a few weeks later, when the work of the Church was about to begin, I cannot attempt to explain; but the fact remains. In Expectation Week, the infant Ecclesia stood between two gifts of the Spirit of God. Is it not, after all, a picture of the constant experience of every Christian? All of us can look back with thankfulness to the past, and to the gifts and graces of God which it has brought us. All of us must look forward to the future, and to the fresh outpourings of the Divine gifts which it has in store for us.

Let us think. An infant is brought to the Church

* John xx. 19. † Luke xxiv. 33.

to be baptized. Is it all an empty form? Is baptism only a social custom, a method of giving a name which is commended for preservation by a venerable antiquity? Assuredly not. The child is brought to baptism because those who bring him believe that thereby he receives a spiritual benefit; because he is then born again to a new life; because he is therein made "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." In a word, the child is baptized because the washing with water brings with it the new birth of the Spirit. And yet what follows? Years after, when the time of discretion is reached and the battle of life is at hand, the same child is brought to Confirmation. And why? Is Confirmation an opportunity for making a public profession, and nothing more? It is much more. Those who are confirmed receive, as we believe, in answer to the prayers of the Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, certified by the laying on of hands. Between Baptism and Confirmation, like the waiting Church between Ascension and Pentecost, we look back to one gift of the Spirit—we look onward to another.

Nor is this all. The gift at Confirmation is not regarded as the final outpouring of the Spirit. At every stage of life the Church bids us ask for the help and grace of the Spirit of God. The *rationale* of our Marriage Service is not exhausted by the exchange of vows of faithfulness; it is prompted by the belief that those who are entering upon a new state of life should seek, and may obtain, a fresh gift from God. Our Services of Ordination are based, not merely on

the truth that no man taketh the honour of the priesthood unto himself, but must be called and appointed thereto by lawful authority. It is the acknowledgment that the ministry of the Church needs special grace, which must be sought from God. And whatever our work in life, we are taught that fresh gifts of the Spirit must ever be sought for by reverent participation in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Baptized, confirmed, we have not, as it were, the whole gift in possession. As life advances, our needs increase ; and the gift of the Spirit must increase with them. Our strength must be apportioned to our day. Our whole Christian walk is prefigured in the Week of Expectation—a looking back in thankfulness, a looking forward in hope. If it be not so, we are not really living the life of Christ. For if the Christian life is being lived in very truth, the prayer which was once said for us must be ever made our own—"Defend, O Lord, this Thy servant with Thy heavenly grace, that he may continue Thine for ever ; and daily *increase* in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thy everlasting kingdom."

To which kingdom may God bring us all by the power of ever-increasing gifts of His Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XII.

HEAVEN.*

"Your reward is great in heaven."—LUKE vi. 23.

"IN heaven." What is heaven? And of what sort shall be our life there? A very easy question to ask, but by no means an easy one to answer. And yet with what flippant exactness it sometimes is answered. First, we have the host of infidel writers, who tell us that the Christian system is utterly immoral, utterly unworthy to be made the basis of a religious life. And why? Because, forsooth, it is selfish in its aim; because we do good here that we may win heaven hereafter; and the Christian heaven, they tell us, is, after all, only a Mohammedan paradise, of perhaps a slightly more refined order. The Christian heaven a Mohammedan paradise! Why, brethren, if there is one thing which strikes us more than another as we turn from the Christian Scriptures to the Mohammedan Bible—the Koran—it is the difference which these two sets of writings exhibit in their treatment of this very subject of heaven. One detail after another is given in the Koran of the abode of luxury and voluptuous

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Sunday, 25th June, 1893.

ease into which the faithful are ushered when death withdraws them from this present scene. But how meagre is the information afforded us in our own Scriptures as to the life beyond! Have we not many a time longed to have the veil drawn aside which hides from our eyes those who have gone before? Have we not yearned to know something of what are and will be the occupations of those whom we have loved here, and who are now for a while parted from us? Yet, as often as these yearnings come to us, we are fain to confess that they can never be fully satisfied here. Such questions about the state of the blessed dead can be answered, not by the revelations of Scripture, but only by the teachings of experience, to be gained hereafter.

And yet it would be far from the truth to say that the Bible tells us nothing about the life of blessedness to which we all hope to come. It is my object this morning to ask your attention to some of those things which Scripture does tell us about heaven. And, first of all, I suppose if we were asked the question what in our minds is the main element in our notion of heaven, most of us would answer that we conceive it as a place—a state—of perfect and eternal happiness. We hope that there all the sorrows, and wrongs, and inequalities of which in this life we have such manifold experience, will be remedied or removed. And if this be our primary conception of heaven, it has ample support from Scripture. It is the conception underlying the text: "Rejoice and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven." So it was that

St. Paul thought of it. "Our light affliction," he says, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."* And so St. John tells us that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."†

Heaven, then, will be a place of happiness.

But we must go a step further. If heaven is to be really happy, it must fulfil the essential condition of all true happiness. Perfect happiness is unattainable without perfect holiness. I need scarcely stay to prove that this is so. I know, indeed, that a certain amount of happiness is enjoyed by many who are not holy, who have no desire to be holy—such lower happiness as consists in the gratification of the desires and appetites of mind and body. But the highest, purest, truest happiness is without holiness impossible. Heaven if it is to be happy must also be holy; and such the Bible assures us it will be. "Beloved," says St. John, "now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him."‡ And, again, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."§ In heaven we shall not only be happy: we shall be holy.

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.
† Rev. xxi. 4.
‡ 1 John iii. 2.
§ Rev. xxi. 27.

Once more. The happiness of heaven involves in it a further condition. In heaven we shall have work to do. Listless idleness is incompatible with true happiness. In heaven, therefore, the servants of God shall serve Him, as the Bible tells us,* with glad and willing work. And, moreover, if idleness is inconsistent with the bliss of heaven, so neither shall our life there be—as some would almost have us think, who insist that metaphors shall be interpreted literally—one ceaseless round of psalm-singing and playing upon harps of gold. The very monotony of such an existence would soon deprive it of all charm. If in heaven we are to be happy, we must have constant, varied, active work.

And now, as we think of this heaven of happiness, the question will occur to us: In what, most of all, do we expect that its happiness will consist? Does not the thought at once arise in every heart that there we shall once more enjoy the society of those whom we have "loved long since, and lost a while"? We shall meet again in heaven those whom we have known here—and not them alone. We trust that there, too, we shall be allowed to be in the company of the great and noble of every age, that "great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."† Heaven shall be the great reunion.

But which of us will say that even this is *all* the happiness for which we hope? Before all things, and

* Rev. vii. 15; xxii. 3. † Rev. vii. 9.

above all things, the happiness of heaven will flow from this, that Jesus Christ Himself will be there among us. This was the promise which the Lord gave to His disciples:—"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* And they never forgot His words. To St. Paul to die was to be with Christ.† His hope for the future was that "we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, . . . shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so *shall we ever be with the Lord.*"‡ And in those last grand prophetic chapters of the Bible the same thought is with us still: "I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them. . . . And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."§ That Jesus Christ shall be in heaven is its chief and greatest joy.

Such, in brief summary, is the teaching of Scripture, so far as it is present to my mind, on the subject of heaven. And, after all, what is it? You may think that it amounts to a good deal. But is it more than this: that in heaven we shall be happy, we shall be holy, we shall be active, we shall be with Christ and

* John xiv. 3. † Phil. i. 23; 2 Cor. v. 6, 8.
‡ 1 Thess. iv. 17. § Rev. xxi. 3, 22, 23.

with those that are Christ's? All is in general terms —not a single detail of the blessed life revealed!

But more. The very moment we begin to work out these general descriptions into detail, we find ourselves involved in difficulty and in perplexity.

We say that in heaven we shall be good. But what does this mean? How is our goodness to have expression? We find that here a man's goodness consists in large measure in denying himself in order to promote the happiness of others. But how can we deny ourselves, how can we help others, in a place where *all* are perfectly and eternally happy? We cannot tell.

We say, again, that in heaven we shall be active. But activity implies progress; and what room can there be for progress when the final goal of perfect happiness and perfect holiness has been reached? What scope is there for work of the *body* when the circumstances of all are exactly adapted to their needs? What possibility of activity of the *mind* when all shall know even as also they are known?* We cannot tell.

Once more, heaven shall be the great reunion. But what will be our relation there to those whom we have loved on earth? Will the natural ties which bind parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife, remain in the life beyond? We cannot tell.

In heaven we shall be with Christ. But of what sort will our communion with Him be? We cannot tell.

All these things are hidden from us. We know

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

them not, and we cannot know. We are very agnostics. So true are the apostle's words, "Beloved, now are we children of God; and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be."*

Now, when once we realize how exceedingly little the Bible reveals to us about our future life in heaven, one inquiry must infallibly suggest itself: Why is this? Why has God left us so utterly in the dark regarding that which lies before us? Holy Scripture tells us many things which do not at all so nearly concern us. Why, then, on this subject, which seems most important of all, has God left us so little, so very little, knowledge?

Completely, indeed, to ascertain *all* the purposes of God in any of His dealings with men, is beyond our power; but some of His purposes we may conjecture, and in this case one at least appears not far to seek.

For why has God told us anything at all about heaven? Is it not obviously that thereby our lives here may be strengthened and made better; in other words, that we may be more *religious?*

And religion is a thing the nature of which men so continually mistake! We so often represent it to ourselves as a matter rather of faith than of works; or, to put it more truly, as a matter rather of theories and probabilities and guesses than of either faith or works. The very meagreness of the revelation about heaven is God's protest against this false religionism. Nothing is told us which could minister to mere idle curiosity, nothing to enable us to map out, as it were, the world to come, as we might otherwise be

* 1 John iii. 2 (R.V.).

inclined to do. Only such information is given us as may make life more worth living, more possible to be lived in the service of God. For remember, little as we know, there is amply sufficient for that. Is not the thought enough to enable us to bear patiently every worry and anxiety and trouble of life—that one day we shall be in a world where pain and sorrow and death no more exist, but all is happiness and peace and rest? Is it not enough to nerve us to endure all temptations, and fight manfully against every form of sin, to remember that the time is coming when we shall *be* all that we now desire and pray to be—when holiness shall reign supreme within us? Is there not enough to make all life sweet in the blessed hope that at last we shall enjoy intimate, close, and constant communion with Him whom we long to love, because He first loved us?

XIII.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES.*

"Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."—ST. MATT. xiii. 24, 25.

IT may sometimes happen that, when a truth of our Lord's teaching has been ignored or controverted, one of His sayings in which it is clearly implied is laid hold of by its defenders and used by them as a proof-text. It is cited again and again as an answer to those who misunderstand His message in this one point, until at length it comes to be viewed almost solely in its bearing on the doctrine which has been called in question; and so its main purport and drift are forgotten. It is treated as if its whole meaning were summed up in that which, after all, is taught only incidentally and by the way.

Something like this seems to have taken place with regard to the parable of the Tares and the Wheat. I suppose most of us know that some have so exaggerated the doctrine of the holiness of the Church, which we profess and believe, as to hold that

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Sunday, 15th August, 1897.

the Church—the true Church, that which alone has a right to the name of Church—must always consist of those only who are true and faithful followers of Jesus Christ; that it is, therefore, not a great visible organization, which must, in the nature of things, number among its members good and bad alike, but rather the invisible society of sincere and loyal Christians, whose limits and extent are known to God alone. Now, it is, I think, quite plain that such teaching as this is absolutely at variance with the general drift of the Gospel. But nowhere perhaps does this appear more distinctly than in the parable before us. The kingdom of heaven, says Christ, or, in other words, the Church, is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field, while an enemy sowed tares among the wheat. The good seed, He explains, are the children of the kingdom; the tares, the children of the evil one; the enemy who sowed them, the devil.* So then in the Church which He founded the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one, the good and the bad, will be found side by side. And this is no mere passing phase in the development of the Church's life. Both are to grow together till the harvest; and the harvest is the end of the age. Clearly, then, the true Church will never in this world be free from the influence of evil. Among its members there will always be bad men as well as good. The inference is unmistakable; the argument is unanswerable. As a weapon of controversy, the parable undoubtedly serves our purpose.

* Matt. xiii. 38, 39.

But we shall all agree that if we reduce anything that the Saviour has said to a mere controversial weapon, if it seems to us nothing more than a convenient answer to an opponent, we must have missed something of its import. Let us try, then, to discover the *main* lesson of this parable; let us see if we cannot find in it something more valuable than a prop of orthodoxy.

We shall be helped, I think, in finding the central thought of the parable by taking note of one or two things which are really quite minor elements of its teaching—if, indeed, they are taught by it at all. The first of these is that of which I have spoken just now, the mixture of good and evil in the Church. It is the merest incident. In the explanation of the parable it is scarcely alluded to; in the parable itself it is not dwelt on with any emphasis. It is not one of those things which are put into the mouth of Him who sowed the good seed. The servants discover it for themselves, and announce it to their Master. "But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?"* What the householder had to tell his servants was not the fact of the mingling of the crop, which their own experience and observation had made known to them, but rather how this mingled crop was to be dealt with. Is it not implied that so, also, in the Church of Christ the co-existence of evil and good was a thing

* Matt. xiii. 26, 27.

which the disciples needed not to learn by revelation? Their own natural common sense and observation would quickly make it known to them. It is rather assumed, taken for granted. What the Lord would teach them was how it was to be dealt with by God and by His faithful people.

Now let us notice another thing which it does not seem to have been Christ's purpose to teach by this parable, though it appears to be sometimes thought that it fell within its scope. So far as I can see, it was not His intention to lay stress upon the fact that men who are really evil may seem to be good. This, indeed, is a thing often implied in the discourses of Christ; but as often it seems to be treated as a thing of which men are well aware, not as something which they have to learn. Their knowledge of it is taken for granted, and it is used as a foundation on which to build other teaching.

Just so it was in the Gospel for last Sunday. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."* This was no new thought; it was an old and familiar fact, expressed in striking words. But Jewish hearers, only too familiar with the phenomenon of the false prophet simulating the true, would have a question to ask: How are we to distinguish the false from the true? How are we to save ourselves from being led astray by these pretenders to the prophetic gift? Christ gives the answer: "By their fruits ye shall know them. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good

* Matt. vii. 15, ff. Gospel for Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

fruit: wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." The disciples, you see, were well aware that they must expect evil in the Church; they were well aware that the evil might wear the appearance of the good. Christ assumes that they knew all this; and He teaches them a further lesson: that for all its false appearance the evil *can* be distinguished from the good which it counterfeits.

And now in our parable all this knowledge is made the stepping-stone to something further. There would be evil in the Church, as they knew: "While men slept the enemy sowed tares among the wheat." The evil would have the appearance of the good, as they knew; for the tares, when they first appeared above the ground, could not be distinguished from wheat. But yet, sooner or later, the difference between them would become manifest; by their fruits they would be known, as the Master had already said. "When the blade was sprung up, *and brought forth fruit*, then appeared the tares also." All that was known; it is only presented under a new figure.

And now, brethren, in order that we may understand what follows, I want you to picture to yourselves that little inner circle of the disciples of the Lord who were present when He spoke. What a splendid band of men and women they were, taking them as a whole! What sacrifices of ease and comfort, of home and friendship, they had made for Christ! What a magnificent moral standard they must have set before themselves! And, as they passed weeks and months in His companionship, how they must have been fired by His words and

deeds! How devoted they must have been—how much more devoted they must each day have become to God and truth and right! What very zealots they must have been for the kingdom of God and His righteousness!

And yet, can we not detect in all this zeal and enthusiasm for higher things a very real source of danger? Nothing, they would say, is so hateful as sin, nothing so fatal to the kingdom as its false members. Should they not then set about driving sin from the Church? Should they not expel from the kingdom of God the children of the devil, who claimed to belong to it? Alas, our poor human nature makes us all so intolerant. If we attain to some nearer and fuller view of the truth, how impatient we become of the dulness of others who cannot see as God has given us to see! The very clearness of our vision puts us out of sympathy with others whose perception is less vivid. When men mount the summits in the spiritual and moral world, and still more in the intellectual world, how apt they are to despise those who still struggle on the lower slopes! The clearness of our grasp of Divine truth, of the meaning of righteousness, our devotion to the nobler and higher life, leads us to condemn more severely the shortcomings of others less advanced. It is only human nature. And the disciples were so human. Can we not imagine, as their zeal for the purity of the kingdom waxed ever stronger, how fiercely they might have used that test: "By their fruits ye shall know them"? How the self-seeking of James and John, who would sit one on the right

hand and the other on the left of the Lord,* would at once be detected as a falling away from the ideal character of the children of the kingdom! How the shameful cowardice of St. Peter would have seemed unworthy of a follower of the dear Lord Who had said that He would deny them that had denied Him!† And so these three would have stood condemned; they would have been driven forth, and the Church would have had no Peter, no James, no John.

This is the very danger which is so graphically pictured for us in the parable. When the seed brought forth fruit, the servants, with eyesight quickened by long exercise, saw, in spite of the seeming likeness of the stalks each to other, that all was not wheat. "When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." They would have rooted out the poisonous weeds at once. "The servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence, then, hath it tares? . . . Wilt thou that we go and gather them up?"‡

The answer of the householder to that question is the very climax of the story. It gives the central lesson of the parable—a lesson which the infant Church, in the freshness of its zeal, had need to learn; which even we, with whom zeal has waned and enthusiasm has grown cold, may well lay to heart. "But he said, Nay: lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

Would, brethren, that those words could be branded upon our hearts. What a protest they are against

* Mark x. 35, ff. † Matt. x. 33. ‡ *Vv.* 26-28.

the petty, uncharitable, unsympathetic judgments which we are always passing upon others!

Mark the words: not "lest ye *leave some tares* growing with the wheat;" but "lest while ye gather up the tares, ye *root up also the wheat* with them." Not, in plainer words, "lest the children of the devil be left in the kingdom;" but "lest the true children of the kingdom be cast out:" not "lest ye mistake hypocrites for saints;" but "lest ye mistake saints for sinners." No doubt, if the servants had had their will, and had been allowed to separate as best they might the spurious from the true grain, they would now and then have left tares standing. But it was a danger so slight that the householder did not think it worth mentioning. The real fear was that, in their eagerness, the genuine wheat might be given to the burning.

Dear friends, if you or I were to set about dividing those of whose lives we know something into the two great classes of children of the kingdom and children of the devil, what fearful blunders we should make! Men's faults are so easily seen: their virtues are often so hidden away. The scoundrel, as we should call him, who forges a cheque—what do we know, or care to know, of his redeeming qualities: of the secret kindnesses to wife and children; of the struggle for right which perhaps was waged in his heart for many a year before the overwhelming temptation came; of the tears and penitence which came too late to undo the mischief? How easy it is to note the hasty temper of your friend; how hard to take account of the earnest striving by which the promptings of that

temper are restrained when you know nothing of it. What a simple matter it is to look with scorn upon the poor girl who has fallen under temptation which you have never felt; while perhaps she is struggling upwards, and only fails to rise for want of the helping hand which you will not hold out. May she not, after all, be a true child of the kingdom, striving, as we have never striven, though, in this life, only to fail?

Are there few that be saved? Who can tell? What does it concern us to know? But be assured of this—for the more we keep it before us, the truer and more sympathetic will be our view of the lives that are being lived around us—many that to our imperfect sight seem as noxious weeds in the field of God, in that day when the angel reapers shall gather in His harvest, will be found to be true wheat, to be stored for ever in the heavenly garner. "Many that are last shall be first."*

No; the kingdom of God is a grander, vaster thing than man would make it. It is not confined to the religious world, to the respectable, the pious, and the orthodox. We dare not, we cannot, limit it to one coterie, or party, or sect, or caste. If the thought ever comes into our hearts that those who in our eyes are erring, or outcast, or sinful are shut out from its blessings, or should be expelled from its borders, the words of Christ are writ large as the answer to our folly: "Let both grow together until the harvest, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

* Matt. xix. 30.

XIV.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.*

He that is not against us is on our part."—ST. MARK ix. 40.

IT is quite plain that the disciples had been thinking a great deal too much of Church membership, a great deal too much of the necessity of attaching oneself to the little band of men who followed Jesus. They had seen a man casting out devils: it is true he did his work in Jesus' name; but he did not join their little Church, he did not follow them, and so they forbade him. Jesus will raise them to a higher level of thought: "Forbid him not," He cries, "for he that is not against us is on our part." It is as if He said—This man is not against us, the very fact that he uses my name is proof sufficient; then he must be on our side; leave him alone; he is, in his own way, doing our work.

How hard it must have been for the apostles to receive this saying! This wonder-worker on *their* part! Certainly appearances were almost all on the other side. The man stood aloof from their society;

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Sunday, 9th September, 1894. This sermon, addressed to a Scottish congregation, mainly composed of the working-classes, speaks in the religious language rather of Scotland than of Ireland.

he refused, no doubt, to recognise the authority which they would have exercised over him ; he was working miracles on his own account ; he was a counter-attraction to Jesus ; he was perhaps drawing away others from their company ; for the marvellous and the novel always have their charm. He was apparently doing much injury to the cause ; how, then, could he be working on their side? Ought not the judgment of the Master rather to have been, "Forbid him, for he that is not with Me is against Me"?

But no. The words of Jesus are pitched in a higher key. In judging of this man, the all-important thing was not whether he had united himself to the little band of disciples; whether he had as yet recognised it as his duty to follow Jesus from place to place throughout Palestine; whether he was obedient to apostolic rule and guidance. All these were important things, no doubt. But the one thing needful was different from them all: What was the moral and spiritual state of the man? Was his heart right? Was he on Christ's side, or on the devil's? Here no middle place was possible: definite loyalty to Christ or definite hostility to His cause ; these are the only alternatives. The man of whose conduct they complained was clearly not against Christ, however wrong and mistaken he was in remaining apart from His company ; therefore in heart and soul, morally and spiritually, he must be *with* Him ; and so, they were to let him continue to cast out devils in the name of Jesus.

Do you not think, brethren, that Christians of all

sects, parties, and Churches need still to learn the same lesson which Jesus taught that day to His disciples? Do you not think that we Episcopalians need to learn it? How natural it is for us to reason as the apostles may have done! We believe ourselves to be the representatives in this land of the Catholic Church of Christ, and yet we find ourselves surrounded on all sides by bodies of Christian men and women doing Christ's work, and yet not of us. Are we not apt to take the lower view, and regard them as being against us? And in one sense, indeed, it is true that they *are* against us. If the work of Christ were being done by no other denomination than ours, our claim to be the one Church of Christ would soon be recognised; our numbers would quickly increase, and the Episcopal Church would soon be the dominant Christian body in this country. The very excellence of the work done by others, the very goodness and power of men of other communions, hinders our triumph. Is it not almost a necessity that we should complain? Are we not tempted to cry out, "Lord, forbid them, for they follow not us"? Yes, this will be our cry if we have attained to the level only of the apostles, and not of Christ Himself. He gives us as our guiding maxim in trying to determine our relation to Christian bodies other than our own, not "He that is not with Me is against Me"—though this maxim has its own application—but rather this, "He that is not against us is on our part." We must recognise the fact, however difficult it may be to grasp it, that all sincere and earnest Christians—nay, more, many noble souls whom we can scarcely class

as Christians at all—are on our part, are doing our work. The main thing is not what Church they belong to, but their whole-heartedness, their sincerity, their absolute loyalty to the cause of God, of Christ, of Truth and Right.

"He that is not against us is on our part." As we endeavour to apply these words to the circumstances of our own age and country, I think it is most important to notice certain things which the Lord did *not* say, as well as to give due weight to what He *did* say.

Let us observe, then, in the first place, that He did not say, "It is a matter of no importance at all whether that man who is casting out devils in my name joins your society or not." He did not say this; and we may go further and assert that, if He had said it, He would have contradicted a large part of His other teaching, and destroyed much of His work. For the Gospel story makes it plain that one purpose of Christ's mission was to found a society, a Church. He did not come into the world merely to enable men to save their own souls. He insisted that all His followers should be banded together in one company and fellowship as members of His Church. It could not, therefore, be a matter of no importance, it could not even be a thing of little moment, whether true-hearted men joined His Church or not. To join the Church *then* meant to follow the Lord and His apostles; and so Jesus could not have intended His disciples to think that it mattered little or nothing that this exorcist who used His name followed not them. It did matter, very

much indeed. It was much to be desired that he should join them; but nevertheless he had done what was even more important, he had taken the right side in the controversy between Christ and the devil; he was on their part, though not with them; and so his work was not to be hindered.

Now, if we have much conversation with earnest people in these days on religious subjects, we shall find that they often express sentiments very different from this. How often do we hear people say, "Oh, it is of no account what Church I belong to, I will join any Church where I am regularly visited by the minister, or where there is good preaching, or good music." Some will even say, "I like the service in the Episcopal Church; but I have joined the Baptists, because the seats in the Baptist Chapel are comfortable, and it is well heated and free from draughts."

Dear friends, this way of choosing one's Church is altogether wrong. It is wrong just because it assumes that it does not matter to what Church we belong. And yet it does matter. It may sound a liberal and large-hearted thing to say, "One religion, one Church is as good as another; I don't care which I go to." This may sound liberal; but it is not at all in Christ's spirit. He looked on it as important that His followers should belong to the true Church; and if He regarded it thus, so should we. We should use our conscience and our reason, and try to find out by means of them what *is* the true Church, and join it. To be sure, if we do this, we may make mistakes; but we cannot help that. It is better far to belong, from conscientious conviction,

to a Church that has no claim upon our allegiance, than to be members of a Church, sound and orthodox and catholic, merely because it suits our convenience, or because the minister is genial and kind, or because we are too lazy to choose another. Whether a man make a right or a wrong choice, he can be fully persuaded in his own mind. He can treat the question as one that is important, as one the answer to which must be sought anxiously and prayerfully; and that is all God wants.

The first thing, then, that we notice Christ did not say to His disciples is, that the man who was casting out devils in His name was just in as good case as if he belonged to the company of the disciples. Now, observe another thing which He did not say. He did not tell the disciples that they were narrow-minded or exclusive, because they kept aloof from this worker of miracles. He did not bid them go help him in his work, or join with him. We have no hint that our Lord gave him encouragement by openly consorting with him. He said: "He that is not against us is on our part; therefore forbid him not;" but He did not say, "Extend to him the right hand of fellowship."

And yet one feels that that is precisely the command that some of us might have put into Christ's mouth, if it had been left to us to choose what He should say. At least, when similar cases arise in our own day, that is exactly what men do say. "You Church people," we hear it said, "are so exclusive, so bigoted. Why do you always think that you are right and all others wrong? There should

be no divisions among Christians. All denominations should combine to do Christ's work. You should extend a right hand of fellowship to others who differ from you; you should ask ministers of other denominations to preach in your churches; you should hold services in which nothing should be done that any loyal servant of Christ could dislike."

What answer are we to give? Just this. No one ever yearned more for unity among those who loved Him than Jesus Christ Himself. Yet this was not the advice which He gave His disciples. He taught them, indeed, that there was something far more important than the question, To what Church do you belong?—the question, namely, Are you loyal to Christ?—but He did not tell them to consort with those who did not see their way to join His Church, however true it may have been that they were loyal to Him. The man who did not follow them was simply to be let alone. Our very loyalty to Christ forbids us to go further than He did. When we see others doing the work of God, we thankfully say: "They that are not against us are for us; we forbid them not;" nay, we rejoice in the advancement of their work, just because it is God's work. By whomsoever the work is done, "Christ is preached, and we therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."* But, for ourselves, we must, in simple loyalty to Christ, in earnest love for Him, do the work which He has given us to do, in the way which we believe to be His way, leaving the issue in His hands.

Let us now sum up, in one or two last words, the

* Phil. i. 18.

lessons which I think we have learned from what Christ said, and from what He did not say, with reference to this man who was casting out devils in His name. We have learned, first of all, how impossible it is for us to abandon the exclusiveness of our own Church in order to unite in work and service with other Christians. We have learned, also, that it is a matter of great concern that men and women should be members of that Church which they are sincerely convinced has real claim upon their hearts and lives. But we have learned this above all: that there is something infinitely more important for every one of us than mere Church membership, that is to say, personal loyalty to Christ. Let us not be satisfied with being members of the Catholic Church unless we have that as well. Let us look on all as brethren who have it, whether within the fold of our own communion or beyond its limits. They are, in the truest and most real sense, "on our part," "with us;" and of them we must say with St. Paul, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." *

* Eph. vi. 24.

XV.

GOD'S NOBILITY.*

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed."—ACTS xvii. 11, 12.

ST. LUKE here speaks of what we may call a spiritual aristocracy: the people of Berea were "more noble." He does not mean merely that they had loftier aims, and were more estimable in character than others. The word which he uses implies that they belonged to the nobility. Their position, their rank in the kingdom of God, was higher than that of the men of Thessalonica. They were God's noblemen; not, as others to whom St. Paul had preached, mere commoners in His sight.

What, then, was it which gave them the right to this exalted title? Our text gives us the answer very definitely. It was not because they at once received the message which the apostle proclaimed; it was not because they accepted without proof the good news of which he was the bearer, and which he declared to be a revelation from God Himself. It

* Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, Sunday Evening, January, 1900.

was for exactly the opposite reason. It was because they did *not* believe at once, because they did *not* take on trust the things that were preached to them. On the contrary, "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so." They brought the apostle's teaching to the test. They were, indeed, determined that, if their searching of the Scriptures assured them that St. Paul was right in what he taught, they would give up their old beliefs, and accept the Gospel; but, unless their searching was a sham—which assuredly it was not—they were no less determined that, if the Scriptures did not confirm what he said, they would not give their allegiance to this new faith. In other words, St. Paul came announcing a doctrine the like of which they had never heard before. They gave him a fair hearing. But they examined the matter for themselves. They went with open mind to their Scriptures. They used the intellect which God had given them, and they determined to abide by the result, whatever it might be. And this was why the Bereans were God's noblemen.

Now, this examining of the Scriptures with open mind was by no means an easy thing. It would have been easier, perhaps, at once to abandon their former religion, to let themselves be captivated by the beauty of the Christian Faith, to say in an indolent way, "This man says he has been sent by God; what he tells us seems good; it is at least very comforting; we may as well cast in our lot with him." This might have been easy. It would have been much easier not to listen to St. Paul at all, to declaim against him as a heretic,

as one who was overturning Moses and the Law and the Scriptures of God. The hardest of all was what they actually did. They had been brought up to think of the Old Testament Scriptures as divine—these and no other. St. Paul did not hint that this was a mistake. They had been accustomed, again, all their lives to believe that these Scriptures pointed onwards to a Messiah who was to come. St. Paul told them that He had come already. They had looked for a Messiah who would be great and glorious among the kings of the earth. St. Paul told them He was born a peasant child, lived in a village carpenter's house, died a shameful death. They had been used to look to Jerusalem as the centre of the earth, the city where Messiah would reign—Jerusalem with its Temple, its Priests, its great religious leaders, whose authority was almost equal to that of the Bible itself. St. Paul preached to them One who had said that in the time to come men would not worship at Jerusalem, that ere long not one stone of that glorious Temple would be left on another; he would tell them that those very priests and teachers of religion had rejected their true Messiah, had caused His cruel death on the cross. Was it not more than could be expected from human nature that they should give any heed to him? He was a renegade Jew pouring contempt on the traditions of the fathers, on the religion in which he was born, of which a little while ago he was such a zealous advocate. There was everything to prejudice them against him, nothing in his favour. We could scarcely have blamed them very much if they had refused to listen to him. They

would only have been doing what very probably most of us would have done if we had been in their place.

But their *nobility* led them to take a different course. In spite of all appearances, there may be something, they think, in what this strange teacher proclaims with such earnestness. They will see. They search the Scriptures. They read the prophecies which St. Paul quotes in favour of his views. It does not seem likely, but it is possible, that he may be giving a better explanation of them than all the famous and learned men among the Jews had given. They must anyhow decide the question for themselves, with their own God-given reason. And so they embark on their inquiry. You know the result: "*Therefore*"—just because they did this, just because they did not accept or reject St. Paul's teaching on the spur of the moment, just because they made free and careful inquiry—"*therefore*," we are told, "many of them believed."

The very first thing that all this teaches us is that faith and reason are not opposed. Those who are most noble in the kingdom of heaven are those who use their reason, and follow it wherever it leads them. The truest Christian faith is the faith which is founded on intellectual conviction, on free inquiry. How very different often is our conception of what faith means! We are impatient of argument and controversy. We do not like to have our cherished convictions interfered with. Some one proposes a new doctrine—new at least to us—we cry out against it at once, because it contradicts what we have always been taught, what we and our fathers before us have always

believed to be true. And we think we show our faith by this obstinate adherence to old beliefs. Is it really so? If it is, faith must have become something quite different from what it was among the Bereans of old. *They* showed their nobility, they won their faith, by casting prejudice to the winds, by free and candid inquiry.

I think, dear friends, it would be good for all of us if we had more in these days of the spirit of the Bereans. This is a time in which many new doctrines are being taught, doctrines which would have shocked the religious men of fifty years ago, doctrines which must, when they are first taught, disturb us all, just as Christianity disturbed the Jews when Christ and His Apostles taught it nineteen centuries ago.

Let me take an example. All of us have at least heard of the doctrines associated with the name of the great scientist Darwin. If his scientific teaching is true, it must lead us to think very differently from what good men used to do of the way in which God created this world in which we live. It is very startling to be told that at the bidding of science we must give up beliefs which for hundreds of years men have held as part of the Christian Faith. And so Darwinism was at once labelled as unchristian. Men sneered at it. How absurd, they said, to suppose that men are descended from apes. *We* at least are not going to be led away by these new-fangled theories. We will hold to the old Faith. What our fathers believed is still good enough for us Whatever science may say will not affect us. Few

thought of asking whether Darwin had reason on his side. A sneer, and an appeal to time-honoured beliefs, was enough.

But was this really right? Was it really Christian? Was it worthy of the nobility of God?

Let me answer these questions by asking another: What would the Bereans have done? What they did do when statements quite as startling as those of any modern scientific discoverer were made to them was this: they used their reason; they examined again the Book of God. Had they lived in these times, the Book of God would still have been their study: it would still have been the test to which all things must be brought; but it would have had a larger meaning than could be covered by the Old Testament Scriptures which were in their hands, written with pen and ink. They would have known that not only the written Scriptures, but the whole world, is the Book of God. That volume of His Holy Word they would have read as well as the other. If it contradicted the new teaching, it stood condemned; if it confirmed it, they would have accepted it.

Let us follow their example. Let us remember, before all things, that our God is a God of truth. And the God of all truth has given us our intellect and our reason in order that we may discover truth wherever it is, and whatever form it may take. If some new theory in science or in theology seems to call us away from our old beliefs, what then? In the name of the God of Truth, let us test it; let us, with all humility, use the reason that the God of Truth has given us, and follow its leading. Let us give

up, if so it must be, beliefs that seem to us most sacred and most beautiful, most cherished and most inspiring. Let us search daily in the Book of God whether these things are so. Free inquiry, honest questioning, will never rob us of real faith. It is only a lie that shuns investigation. And we are sons and daughters of the God of Truth, Who cannot lie. We are followers of Him who said, I am the Truth.

XVI.

FAITH AND SUPERSTITION.*

"She said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."—MATT. ix. 21, 22.

"WHAT is truth?" So asked Pilate. He was but echoing the cry which was being uttered everywhere throughout the world. Men had searched in vain for truth; and at length, baffled and bewildered, they had lost heart. They had almost come to doubt the very existence of truth; they had ceased to be earnest in the search for it. At length Christ came into the world. He proclaimed Himself to be the Truth. The quest was at last, in one sense, over. The very Truth was found. And so for the humblest Christian the question which philosophers put in vain, What is truth? is answered.

But there is another question which, even by Christians, is still asked, and is still hard to answer, What is faith?

All through the New Testament, faith is everywhere spoken of as a thing of the highest importance. It conveys a new power to men. If we have faith as

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Sunday, 24th November, 1895.

a grain of mustard-seed, we may remove mountains. The absence of faith creates spiritual impossibilities. "Jesus could do there no mighty work because of their unbelief."* Again and again faith is said to be the condition on which the working of His miracles depended.† By faith—faith, no doubt, demonstrated, because it is expressed, in works, but, nevertheless, by faith—we are saved. "Salvation by faith only," said Luther, "is the article of a standing or a falling Church." Luther may have been right in this, or he may have been wrong; but no one who reads the New Testament can deny that faith is a matter of vital importance; that it is of the very essence of the Christian life.

And yet, what *is* faith? Those who have been foremost in pressing home upon men its absolute necessity, have been least able to answer the question. One theologian defines faith in this way, another in that, till sometimes we are inclined to wonder whether it has any meaning at all, or whether its meaning can be found.

Now, it sometimes happens that we can acquire some notion of what a thing *is* by, first of all, thinking of what it is *not*. And so this evening I shall ask you to consider some things which are *not* faith.

In the first place, then, faith is not a mere affair of the intellect, of the mind. It is quite possible for a man to *believe*, and yet not to have faith in the religious sense. The devils believe, St. James tells

* Matt. xiii. 58; Mark vi. 5, 6. Compare Matt. xvii. 19, 20.

† Matt. viii. 13, ix. 2; Mark ix. 23, x. 52; Luke xvii. 19. Compare Acts xiv. 9.

us.* He might have said, "They know." This is, doubtless, the way in which St. Paul would have put it. The devils believe and know; and have they faith? No; they tremble. They believe because they cannot help believing. They believe *because* they know. They believe because reason and intellect compel them to believe. Their belief is a matter of intellect alone. It evokes no change of life and conduct. The heart, the will, the affections have nothing to do with it. Therefore it is that, though believing, they have not faith.

The first thing, then, that we learn about faith is that it is not mere intellectual assent. Let us try to understand what this involves.

In the first place, then, it means that religious faith, as distinguished from mere intellectual assent, has to do, not with one department of our nature only, but with our whole being. It must affect all: it must bring all into subjection. Do we realise this, as, day after day, in our public worship, we recite the Creeds, the articles of our Faith? "I believe in God the Father. I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, Who was born of the Virgin, Who died and rose again, Who ascended into heaven. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the Catholic Church." Is it all no more than the expression of the fact that, as the result of certain lines of reasoning, I have come to the conclusion that matter and force are not sufficient to account for the existence of the universe, but that they imply a Creator? Is it only to say, in other words, that certain his-

* James ii. 19.

torical statements of the Evangelists are trustworthy, just as we might say that Kinglake's *Crimea* is a reliable book? Is it only that there are three Persons in the Godhead, and that one of these is named the Holy Ghost? Is it only that, eighteen centuries ago, a society came into being, which still exists, and which is called the Church? If that be all, the Creed has no more religious value, no more right to a place in our worship, than a statement of our assent to the arguments of Euclid. But surely the "I believe" of the Creeds does mean far more than this. The belief in God the Father carries with it love to Him Who made the world, Who rules and preserves it, Who called us into being, Who gives us faculties for His service, Who implants within us the knowledge of good and evil. Belief in the Incarnation and the Death of Christ, if it be a real belief in the religious sense, must lead to gratitude for the infinite love which moved Him to empty Himself of His glory, and become obedient, even unto death, for us. Belief in the Divine Spirit, Who leads us to truth and holiness, will assuredly make us thankful for all the benefits which His life-giving energy bestows upon us. Faith embraces not only our intellect, but our affections To believe in God is to love Him.

But, again, to love God is also to fear Him. Love, without an effort of the will, is but an idle play of unprofitable emotion. If we truly believe in God, we shall of very necessity consecrate our lives to His service; our whole desire will be to bring our will into conformity with His. To have faith in God is

to believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. It belongs to our whole being, and not to any one part of it, however noble, however Divine.

That is part of what we mean when we say that faith is not a mere affair of the intellect. But, once more, if this be true, it follows that the *amount* of our belief is no true measure of our faith. Faith is not a matter of believing much, in contrast with believing little. Most of us, I dare say, can, without doubt or misgiving, affirm our assent to the statements of the Creed; many can go further, and with all sincerity receive that which is sometimes, by a painful abuse of language, called "Church teaching"—those less essential, less important, and more disputable elements, that is, of our Church's doctrine, which have not been thought worthy of a place in the great symbols of our common Christianity; we acknowledge as true the teaching of Catechism, Prayer Book, and Thirty-nine Articles. It may be, in truth, a blessed and a happy thing for us to be able to do this. But few of us can live our lives without meeting many who are less fortunate in this respect than ourselves. Have they less faith? If faith is only intellectual, only a mental assent to so many abstract propositions, the answer must certainly be, Yes. But, if it be more than this, who shall venture to say so? Belief is only faith, if it is belief of the heart as well as of the mind. Better, far better, is it to believe little, and to bring our will, our emotions, our affections, into harmony with that

little, than to believe much, while our life remains no better and no richer for it all. To believe but little is true faith, if it is a real factor in the life; to believe much is no faith, if it is belief and nothing more.

And again—it is little more than saying the same thing in a different way—faith is not mere credulity, the aptitude for believing without evidence or reason. Credulity, if we consciously yield to it, so far from being faith, is its very contradiction. It is plain dishonesty. Faith has an intellectual element, and, like all other beliefs, the belief on which faith rests must be sincere conviction. Belief in the facts of religion needs evidence for its support just as much as belief in the facts of history or of science, or in the conclusions of philosophy.

And lastly, faith is a very different thing from superstition. Perhaps it is true that most of the superstitions which still remain among us have had their roots in faith; but as they are, as we know them, they are too often but the lingering remnants of a dead credulity. The superstition, for example, which hinders some from beginning any fresh undertaking on a Friday, no doubt grew out of respect to the day on which the Lord of Glory poured out His life-blood for us on the cross of Calvary. But now it influences those who have but little reverence for that mystery of mysteries; it is no more than a vague dread, a homage to fatalism; it has no relation whatever to religion, or to the faith which religion demands. And so again, when we see the devout Romanist bidding his beads, saying for this one an

Ave, for that a Pater, in wearisome monotony, do we not at once set down his "devotion," as he would call it, as the outcome of a gross superstition? In its origin, it is true, it implied trust in the Fatherhood of God, a true and real faith which led to the life of prayer; but in actual practice it means no more than that God—for all His title of our Father—is a fetish who must be appeased by vain repetitions which are a weariness to the flesh.

Surely, dear friends, it would be well for us to bear these things in our memory when we examine ourselves whether we are in the Faith. Is our faith founded on sincere intellectual conviction, a conviction which exerts its influence on life and action, on will, emotion, affection? Is it a faith that excludes all thought of merit in proportion to the amount that we believe, all credulity and superstition? If so, it is true faith. If not, it is worse than conscious disbelief, because it is the counterfeit of something better than itself.

Some such thoughts as these may perhaps help us as we look within; as we try to test our own faith; as we put to ourselves the all-important question whether we have faith at all. But very different must be our thoughts as we make the attempt—if we must make it—to estimate the faith of others.

Faith, I have said, is not superstition. But it is very easy for us to regard those as merely superstitious who have, if the truth were told, a deeper and more efficacious faith than ours. Superstition is not faith; but superstition may co-exist with faith. Superstitious people may have along with, and at the root of,

their superstition a faith which truly deserves the name. Nothing strikes one more as we read the Gospels than the fact that our Saviour always required faith when He worked miracles. He *could* not do His mighty works except for those who had faith. And yet how often the faith which He accepted as sufficient would have been looked upon by us in our superiority as naught but superstition? I might take many examples; but that which our text from this day's Gospel* supplies is sufficient.

What, ~~think you,~~ could be more superstitious than the motive which led ~~that poor~~ woman to ~~seek from Jesus Christ~~ the healing which she needed? Her one thought may have been no more than this: My life is embittered and made miserable by this terrible disorder; the physicians have been powerless to give me relief.† Here is this young teacher who is working cures far and wide; perchance He may do me some good. She had perhaps never seen the Lord, she had perhaps never heard His words. She thought of Him, it may be, as ignorant people still think of holy wells, or relics of saints, that work marvellous cures of all sorts of disorders. She had no conception of the Divine will of the Christ being exerted on her behalf; she conceived that she might even extract a cure from Him against His will, or at least without His knowledge—"If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." Even when the cure was wrought, nothing entered into her mind as its cause, save

* The Gospel for the Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

† Mark v. 26; Luke viii. 43.

this magic touch. Was it not gross superstition? Yet the Lord Himself turns to her, and says, "Thy *faith* hath made thee whole." The faith was real, however it may have been coloured and hidden by superstition. What man would have called superstition, the Lord Himself called faith, so easily may the one be mistaken for the other. The Mohammedan with his mat, the Romanist with his string of beads, the Indian with his praying-wheel, *we* call superstitious. Who knows but that in the eyes of a pure and holy God their prayers may be more real, because more full of faith, than ours, whose faith is no more than a barren and resultless belief?

But, before I conclude, let me draw another lesson from the story to which the Church invites our attention to-day. I have spoken of the need of examining ourselves as to the reality of our faith. It is a duty which certainly cannot be declined. But the story of this woman whom Christ healed seems to hint to us that it is a thing which may be overdone. *She* had faith; but if the question had been put to her, could she have told the questioner that she had? One cannot think so. It needed the assurance of the Lord to reveal it to her. She had something within her which moved her to come to Him; but whether if cross-examined it would have satisfied the definition of theologians, is another matter. Perhaps to test it, would have been to destroy it altogether. She knew her infirmity, she had confidence in the power of Christ, and that was all. Had she faith? If she could have answered the question, at least she came to Him without asking it. Do you not think

brethren, that it would be better for us if we acted more as she did? Have I faith? How many a one who really desires to love God and to serve Him perplexes himself with the thought! And then he turns his gaze within, he probes his feelings, he doubts whether he has the ecstasy, the joy, that saving faith must bring. Is it not to begin at the wrong end? What have our feelings and our emotions to do with it? If the true living faith is there, these things will take care of themselves. Do we know our infirmity, as this woman knew hers? That is the fundamental question. If we do, let us turn our eyes, not inwards to ourselves, but outwards to Christ. Let us not scrutinise too narrowly how much or how little we believe, how much or how little we feel. Faith cannot be measured, least of all by such things as these. Let us think only of Christ, and the power of His Cross to take away the sin of the world. Let us turn to Him. If we do but touch the hem of His garment, we shall be whole.

XVII.

SOWING AND REAPING.*

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—GAL. vi. 6, 7.

THESE words seem to me to be among the most startling and terrible to be found anywhere in St. Paul's Epistles. It is not, indeed, that the central thought of the passage, or the metaphor by which it is expressed, is unusual. In every age and in every nation men have been impressed with the fact that deeds once done are irrevocable, that no act stands by itself, that everything that we do has consequences which cannot be arrested. It is thus that the present and the future hang upon the past. No repentance, no reformation, can undo the sin for which we sorrow; it is in a sense true that it cannot even avert its punishment. By the misdeeds committed years ago, we have led others astray from the path of right. Will any change in *our* heart, any amendment in our life, bring *them* back again? And when *we* return to our true selves, when we gain the victory in our struggle with sin, and become holier and more like God, the agony of remorse will become ever greater.

* Edinburgh Cathedral, 7th October, 1900: Harvest Festival.

More and more we shall hate the wickedness which we see in them ; more and more we shall hate ourselves, as we remember that it is our work. The punishment of sin is not something inflicted, as it were, by the arbitrary appointment of God. It is the natural result of the sin itself. This is a truth so plainly written in the experience of every life that it cannot but be observed by all. And when we seek for a simile of this ever-present law, to what shall we more naturally turn than to that most striking instance of cause and effect, seed-time and harvest? And so the saying, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," became a proverb, a commonplace of literature. We find it in heathen writers no less than in Christian ; it meets us in the Old Testament as well as in the New. St. Paul himself uses it several times. And wherever it occurs in his writings it is in the very same connexion in which it stands in our text : it is always applied to the duty of almsgiving. In the passage which was read as the Second Lesson this morning, he speaks of the collection which was being made for the poor saints at Jerusalem. And these are the words with which he exhorts the Corinthians to liberality :—"This I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."* To the Philippians he wrote concerning a contribution which they had made, and sent to him at Rome. Again his thought is of the harvest that they shall reap : "I rejoice that now at length ye have caused your thought of me to put forth new shoots.† Not

* 2 Cor. ix. 6. † ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν.

that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the *fruit* that increaseth to your account."* And once again, when he would teach the Corinthians their duty to support their clergy; "He that plougheth," he says, "ought to plough in hope. If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?"† The preacher sows the good seed of the word: he has a right to reap at least a carnal harvest, that is, his maintenance in return for his labours.

What renders the metaphor of our text so startling, then, is not the sentiment itself, nor the subject to which it is applied, but the terrible words—the fierce words I had almost said—with which it is introduced, the scathing language in which it is amplified:—"Be not deceived; God is not mocked. He that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."‡ He pierces beyond the veil that hides the other life. He tells us that there too this inexorable law of nature penetrates. Not only in this world, but in the world to come, does sin bring its own punishment. We shall suffer there for the evil which we have wrought here, not because the vengeance of an angry God demands satisfaction, but because as surely as autumn follows spring, as surely as the harvest follows the sowing of the seed, punishment must follow sin. It is the certain, the natural outcome of the irrevocable past.

That was why the failure of the Galatians to

* Phil. iv. 10, 17 (R.V.). † 1 Cor. ix. 11 (R.V.).
‡ Gal. vi. 7, 8 (R.V.).

provide adequate support for their clergy was in St. Paul's view so lamentable. By this omission of a Christian duty they were, in fact, casting seed into bad soil; they were sowing unto their own flesh. The eternal harvest would be a harvest of corruption.

Now, is it not surprising to find St. Paul appealing to such a principle as this in order to enforce what is, after all, only one, perhaps we might say, only a minor, duty of the Christian life: the duty of contributing to the support of the ministry? Try to imagine a preacher from this pulpit using such language in exhorting his hearers to give liberally to some object for which he is pleading. Suppose, for example, that he were laying before you the claims of some of the schemes of the Representative Church Council, and that he spoke thus: "Your response to my appeal will be a test of your Christian faith; it will have its effect in your eternal well-being. If you give as you ought, you will sow to the Spirit, and the harvest will be life eternal; if you withhold your money, you will sow to your own flesh, and hereafter you will reap corruption." Would you not describe his appeal as a piece of blustering unreality? And yet you would never think of passing such a criticism on St. Paul when he writes to the same purpose.

Wherein lies the difference? Is it not just here, that St. Paul really believed in the principle which he states, in a way in which few of us do? Is it not, also, in this, that he realised the dignity and the importance of *all* life, of its least as well as of its greatest acts; that he regarded religion as having to

do with them all; that, in his view, not only those deeds which remain in our memory, and which attract the notice of others, but those, also, which are easily forgotten, even by the doer, those which no eye sees but the eye of God, are the sowing of seed which shall yield an eternal harvest of reward or punishment? That is the truth which is insisted on in the text, and which is clothed in the language of a proverb: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

It is a truth of which we need to be reminded. For we, too, have our proverb—a proverb not unlike St. Paul's in form, which yet expresses an ignoble falsehood. We talk of a young man sowing his wild oats, and perhaps we smile. Do we forget that wild oats sown in early life must inevitably, by the very laws of nature, yield their harvest? Youth and early manhood are as important as any later period of life —nay, they are more important. No respectability in age, no devoutness, no holiness, can reverse the irreversible. He that starts upon his course by sowing wild oats, sows seed in the soil of his own flesh; and of the flesh he must reap corruption.

St. Paul does not forget that the principle of the text applies to good works as well as to evil. "Let us do good," he says, "unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap."† It is the echo of the Master's words, in a different context: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only,

* Gal. vi. 10. † *V.* 9.

in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."* Nature is absolutely impartial. She forgets nothing. The smallest act of kindness, no less than the least deed of wrong, draws after it its unfailing and eternal reward.

Thanks be to God, although this is true, it is, after all, only a half truth. For if it stood alone, it would leave us in the depths of despair. And the Gospel is not a message of despair, but a message of hope. It is when we gauge the measure of our despair that we can form some conception of the glory of our hope.

At the very same time when the apostle was administering stern rebuke to the Galatians, at the very time when he penned the hard saying of our text, he was teaching doctrines which are at least complementary to that of which we have been thinking, which, at first sight, seem almost to contradict it.

The cup of cold water given to a disciple will, by a natural law, produce its own reward. Most true; but let us not imagine that this reward is so necessary a consequence that it may be claimed as of right. The reward is not of debt, but of grace. Are we to think, then, that it follows any the less by a law of nature? Most surely not. For what are these laws of nature of which men speak? Are they, when all is said, any more than the ways in which God, who is a God of order, and not a God of confusion, wills to work? God is not, and cannot be, bound by them. The reward may come as the result of natural law; but still it is produced by the will of God. It is, like the

* Matt. x. 42.

laws themselves, an instance of His grace and goodness. We must thank Him for working by that law which renders to every deed its own recompense.

And again, every wrong act, in virtue of the same laws of nature, is visited with punishment. Shall we say, then, that repentance and amendment of life are useless? Shall we say that, since our sins are far in excess of our righteousness, the final reward will be swallowed up and annulled in the final punishment? God forbid. To say this would be to contradict every line that St. Paul ever wrote; it would be to annihilate the Gospel. One law of nature is suspended, is modified in its effect, by another. The stone, which the law of gravity draws to the ground, is stayed in its downward course by the action of my will, which, under another law, raises it upwards. And so it is in all things. The result which will be produced by any one law cannot be computed without taking into account all the other laws which act against it and destroy its effect. Is there, then, any law which modifies the law that wrongdoing inevitably produces punishment? Sin is a cause which, by an unalterable law of nature, produces eternal suffering. Is there any other cause which counteracts it, which does away with its effect?

We know, brethren, that there is such a counteracting cause. It is the sacrifice of the Life and of the Death of Christ. We may not know, we cannot know, the law of its working. But this we know, that it may counteract all other causes which lead to pain or sorrow in the great hereafter. The sting of death is sin. It is a law of nature that it should be

so. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* The power by which sin brings forth death is destroyed by His atonement, wrought for ever on the cross of Calvary: "He has overcome the sharpness of death; He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

And now let us try to reverse this line of thought. By so doing we may perhaps learn something as to the meaning of our services to-day. We have come together to thank God for the harvest which has been safely stored. But, as we do so, doubts perhaps arise in our hearts. We wonder whether we can really thank God for this, in view of what science tells us as to the laws of nature. Science teaches that, given the antecedents, the result must inevitably follow. In very truth, and apart from all metaphors, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Man ploughs and sows; the laws of nature do the rest. Ought not our thanks, then, rather to be given to the farmers, who have laboured for our profit, than to God, whom science is, day by day, shutting out more and more from influence on the result?

I ask again, What are the laws of nature? If there be a God at all, are they anything but the rules of order according to which He works? If God, in His wisdom and in His love for us, has made for Himself such laws of working that by our labours we can provide ourselves with food, ought we not to thank Him for His mercy?

And, after all, are we so sure that, given the soil, and the seed, and the labour, and the weather

* 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

produced by natural causes, we can indeed predict the harvest? Given all these things, man, by his own will, without violating any law of nature, can hinder the harvest from being produced. He many a time does so, when farms are laid waste by war. If our wills can do this, is the will of God less powerful over His own laws? The law of nature is that sin produces the fruit of death. But the exercise of the will of God enters in, and the fruit is destroyed. The Son of God became incarnate, and the harvest of death is swallowed up in victory. Is the will of God of less avail in inanimate nature than in the lives and destinies of men? Soil and labour, sunshine and rain and wind, we may be bold to say, cannot do everything. There may be, there is, a cause which science cannot reckon. The laws of nature, without the co-operation of the will of the Heavenly Father, would give us no harvest. And as the harvest comes to us year by year, the joy of thankful hearts should find expression in words of praise.

On this day our Christian hymn has a fulness of meaning, which, even at more purely Christian festivals, it cannot have: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven *and earth* are full of Thy glory. Glory be to Thee, O Lord Most High."

XVIII.

JUDAS ISCARIOT.*

"Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."—JOHN xii. 4-6.

JUDAS the Traitor! Has ever any name in history been so utterly branded with infamy as his? Judas, who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver! One can scarcely pronounce his name without a shudder. And so it has always been. Even in the Apostolic writings we may trace signs of it. You remember, when St. John was about to record the question of Judas Lebbaeus in the upper room, how he introduced it: "Judas saith unto Him—*not Iscariot.*" The very penning of the traitor's name recalled to his mind all that awful association of guilt and sin which was evermore to be coupled with it; he must not allow his readers to imagine that the traitor had any place in that sacred scene: lest the very paper on which he writes should be polluted, he adds, "not Iscariot."

But, from the Apostles' days, let us move forward

* Edinburgh Cathedral, Sunday, 27th June, 1894.

to our own time. Is not every one familiar with the representations of Judas which the pencils of modern artists have supplied to us? Think of that face, stamped with the impress of sin in its every feature—the cunning, cruel eye, the beard that has become a proverb, the averted gaze, always out of harmony with its holy surroundings. *This* is Judas as we picture him—a very monster of iniquity, scarcely a man, a fiend incarnate. His terrible sin has so completely filled our minds that we cannot, without an effort, even conceive him apart from it. His very look, his very mien, declares him an intruder in the glorious company of the Apostles.

If this be, indeed, a true representation of Judas, a meditation upon his character can yield little profit for us. But it is not, it cannot be. Judas, traitor though he was, was no monster, no fiend, but a man; subject to a man's temptations, a man's impulses for good, a man's hopes, and a man's fears. It is because men have allowed themselves to dwell too exclusively on his sin that they have ever thought otherwise. The contemplation of that awful deed of shame has taken possession of their thoughts; they have been unable to paint in dark enough colours the character of one who could stoop to such an act of greed and treachery.

Let us this morning try to approach this subject, as it were, from the opposite direction. Let us shut out from our thoughts the memory of that infamous bargain, that treacherous kiss, and ask ourselves, what, apart from all this, do we know of Judas Iscariot and his character?

Not perhaps much; yet something; quite sufficient to make us pause before we set him down as a man utterly devoid of nobility and worth. We know this, first of all, that he was a disciple of Jesus Christ. Think what that involved. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."* So said Jesus Himself, dissuading one from becoming His disciple. And as was the Master, so, no doubt, were His followers. They, too, the companions of His ministry, had with Him to endure hardness, to suffer hunger and thirst, privation and weariness; to give up father and mother, brother and sister, houses and lands—*all* for His dear sake. And was this a necessity from which Judas alone of all the disciples was exempt? Did he alone join that little band without the sacrifice of his ease and comfort? Did he alone become a disciple from some utterly selfish motive? It is impossible to believe it. The very fact of his discipleship assures us that he had nobility enough in his own poor faltering way to love Jesus, spiritual discernment enough to acknowledge Him as the Christ. Does any of us do more?

But Judas was more than a disciple; he stood in a far closer relation to his Master than did the average believer. He was one of the Twelve; chosen by Christ Himself to a position of the highest honour and responsibility; one whose office entitled him to sit on one of the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.† Did the Saviour go through the solemn farce of appointing to such a position a hardened

* Matt. viii. 20. † Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 30.

villain, one who had no fitness for his sacred calling? No. Jesus Christ must have seen in Judas at least some germ of good; at least some capacity for noble work, or He would never have introduced him into the apostolic band. True, He must have foreseen how little all his higher qualities would avail, to how sad an end the man whom He had chosen would come; but had not the capacity, the promise of good been there when Judas was set apart as an apostle, his selection by Jesus is reduced to a mockery. In the apostleship of Judas we have our second guarantee of his noble and generous character.

And a third guarantee is not wanting. He was trusted by those who had the best reason to know what manner of man he was. He carried the bag. He was purse-bearer in the little company of his fellow-apostles. He dispensed their charities, he managed their common property. Galilean fishermen are not likely to have kept accurate ledgers, or to have had strict audits of their accounts; the man to whom they entrusted their money was a man in whom they felt they could have confidence. And their trust of Judas continued to the end, and extended to higher things than this. At that last meeting of the Twelve, when Jesus made the sad announcement, "One of you shall betray me," each one answered, "Lord, is it I?"* None suspected Judas. Nay, every man was more fearful of his own fall than of that of any other. Judas was still trusted by those who knew him best.

Do you doubt the estimate which Jesus formed of Judas? Do you think the Apostles were mistaken?

* Matt. xxvi. 21, 22.

Judge then for yourselves. Consider that last scene of all. The fatal deed is done. Judas at last awakens to the consciousness of what he has wrought. He has brought about the death of that dear Master whom in his own way he loves. His life is unbearable. He rushes to the temple, casts his wretched gains into the sanctuary, and goes and hangs himself.* Can you not see in his remorse, in his very suicide, some remains of generous feeling, of noble impulse? At least he has so much of good left in him that the thought of Jesus, suffering, dying, through his act, is one that he cannot bear.

Let us try and lay hold of this fact: that at the beginning of his intercourse with Jesus, Judas was a man noble and generous in disposition, a man of capacity, a man of worth, having something in him which might have developed into great good, great usefulness. And yet, after three short years—three such years—he was guilty of the foulest crime which has ever darkened the page of history. How did it come to pass? What was there in the society of Jesus and of those who followed Him to drag a man down to such a depth of infamy?

One thing is clear. The traitor acted under the influence of an over-mastering passion to which he had allowed himself to be enslaved. Judas sold his Master from the sole motive of greed. Mary had broken the box and poured out the ointment. It is Judas who discovers that it might have been sold for three hundred pence. It is he who complains of the waste.† And *then* it was, as St. Matthew tells us, that

* Matt. xxvii. 3-5. † John xii. 4, f.

he went to the priests to arrange his nefarious bargain for the betrayal.* He had lost three hundred pence by the foolish extravagance of Mary ; perhaps he may regain it by selling Jesus. The money is paid, and Judas, once true-hearted, now a miser and a thief, has betrayed his Lord.

Judas, no doubt, was always grasping, always fond of money ; but what a desperate downfall was this ! From whence came the temptation which led him so far away from that which was right and good ? There is no great difficulty in answering the question. The source of temptation to Judas was the office which he held. How easy it was to gratify that fatal craving of his ! How simple a matter when he wanted money to borrow from the common stock ; how simple a matter also to forget to replace what he had taken for his own use ! Can we not in imagination trace the steps by which the passion for riches became stronger the oftener it was indulged ; how the infrequent practice gradually became the settled habit ; how the occasional motive became the guiding, the impelling principle ? "Judas kept the bag." This it was which led to his fall. His ordinary daily duty, from this sprang the temptation which at the last caused his ruin. And, surely, if we are to be just to him, we must admit that for such a man the strain put upon his moral rectitude by his office was enormous.

But stay. If we are to be just to Judas, let us also be just to Him who gave him his post, or, at least, who allowed him to hold it. His office as purse-

* Matt. xxvi. 14.

bearer was a fearful trial, the instrument of an awful temptation; but was it not also a glorious opportunity? It led to his ruin; but how different all might have been if only the temptation had been withstood. Every time Judas helped himself from the bag his character became weaker, his passion for money stronger. But, if only the itching fingers had been restrained from that miserable pelf, if only Judas had overcome his craving, each recurring temptation would have been to him a fresh source of strength, a fresh help to nobility. The very office which seemed to drive him down to hell, might, if he had used it aright, have been the means of raising him upwards; of enabling him to overcome his besetting sin; of making him nobler, purer, more sincere; of preparing him for the presence of God.

Do not imagine, brethren, that the story of Judas is anything utterly strange or exceptional. It may be repeated in the life of any one of us. To each of us God has given an office, a life duty. It is, perhaps, some work in the Church of God. It may be what we are pleased to call a merely secular employment. Whatever it is, be assured of this: from it will spring our great and sore trial. It may lead to our moral ruin; or, if we use it rightly, it may be the means in God's hands of raising, of strengthening, ennobling our character. Which shall it be? All depends upon ourselves. Let us not regard lightly our ordinary routine existence, our work at home, or in the office, or in the workshop; let us learn something from the career of Judas, of the awful responsibility and seriousness of the most ordinary calling in life.

But his post as purse-bearer was not the only thing which had influence on the life of Judas. Something else there was which might, we think, have kept him safe from all risk of spiritual failure. It was that highest privilege, which he enjoyed, of constant intercourse with the holy Jesus Himself. Surely the words of life which fell from His lips ought to have kept him from falling. And, many a time, as we read the Gospels, we are almost forced to think that the sayings of Jesus were spoken with reference to the failing of Judas. Many a time at least they gain vividness and force when we remember that Judas was among the hearers. "No man can serve two masters," cried Jesus, "for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* And Judas heard the words. Was it not the very impossibility which he was trying to accomplish? To love Jesus and to serve mammon; to follow the Lord and to heap up wealth, at the same time. How the words must have cut him to the heart! How they must have stirred his better feelings! Why then, did he not battle against his sinful desire, and give himself more wholly to Christ? Who knows? How often have we ourselves had our feelings stirred by an earnest sermon; how seldom has our will been really moved by it; how seldom have the words, which roused our emotions, really strengthened our lives. So it was with Judas. The warning words left him, not stronger, but weaker. He had heard them, and had

* Matt. vi. 24.

not used them, and so his ears were prepared to hear again, and not to heed. And thus, warning after warning came, and as each passed by disregarded, Judas sank lower and lower in the spiritual scale, till, at length, that last warning of all, which we might have thought would have roused the slumbering conscience, had no result. Jesus said to him: "That thou doest, do quickly," and he went out, "and it was night."*

Sad picture! Here was a man, gifted with the greatest privilege, perhaps, which God has ever granted to any of His children, the privilege of constant companionship with Jesus Christ. But the privilege misused became, not a blessing, but a curse. The very preaching of the Lord Himself drove him faster, more hopelessly, to his doom.

Brethren, it is ever so. God gives us countless privileges, but no irresistible grace. All depends upon how we use His gifts. Is it to be with us as it was with Judas? We have been baptized; we have been confirmed; we are communicants; we have opportunities of public worship, of hearing the truth of God. In all these ways, God means to endow us with blessings. Shall they be blessings or curses? God only knows; but the matter lies in our own hands.

You know the end of Judas. He lived a life full of opportunity—full of glorious privilege. He fell. Remorse filled his heart. Life became unendurable. He preferred risking the horrors of an unknown eternity to the certain misery of life in the world.

* John xiii. 27, 30.

He sought death by his own hand ; and then—who shall say? Let us leave him in the hands of a just and merciful God: * and, for ourselves, fear, and pray that our last end be not like his.

* The writer of an article in *The Church Quarterly Review* (vol. li, p. 190) "was touched, not surprised, to hear that Gregor Lechner, who personated the character of Judas Iscariot [in the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play] in the years 1870 to 1890 with such masterly tragic intensity, refused altogether to believe that Judas was ultimately lost. He maintained to the end of his life that the unhappy being whom he personated was a good man, carried away by an over-mastering temptation, and that his Lord would never allow him to be lost."

XIX.

THE DOUBT OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST.*

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."—MATT. xi. 2-5.

WE celebrate this week the Festival of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. It will not be amiss, therefore, if we spend a short time to-day in considering an incident in his life. I choose one in which commentators have found much of perplexity and of difficulty—difficulty arising, not so much from anything obscure or hard to understand in the narrative, as from the almost impossibility of squaring it with preconceived notions of what the saint ought to have done or ought not to have done.

Two messengers come from the Baptist to Jesus Christ. Their message is a strange one. "Art thou He that should come," they ask, "or do we look for another?" Art Thou the Christ, or not? Our master is in doubt. Tell us what answer we shall bring to him.

* Christ Church, Kingstown, Sunday, 21st June, 1891.

Is it not startling to find St. John the Baptist putting such a question as this? His life and work are summed up in one sentence by the Evangelist when he says: "There was a man sent from God to bear witness to the Light, and his name was John."* It was he who pointed all who listened to him to Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ; who "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ;" who said, "There standeth one among you whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."† It was he who bid his disciples look to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."‡ And had John at length come to hesitate about the claims of Jesus? Had the witness sent from God himself need of testimony? Had the Baptist for the moment turned sceptic, that he asks the question, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another"?

So it would seem. And, indeed, when we think of it, we shall less and less wonder that the faith of such a man, at such a time, should, for a while at least, have become shaken. For there was much that must have perplexed him in the career of Jesus. Was it not, in almost every particular, different from the expectation which he must have formed of the Messiah? John, no doubt, was a prophet—nay, the greatest of the prophets. But we must not, therefore, imagine that he knew all the counsel of God. He was the forerunner of the Christ, and he

* John i. 6, 7. † John i. 20, 26, 27; Matt. iii. 11.
‡ John i. 29.

was enabled to perceive, before other men had done so, that Jesus was the Messiah, whose coming the whole Jewish people awaited. But it by no means follows that he saw more clearly than other men of his day what the nature of the Messiah's kingdom was to be. All men are more or less influenced by the current opinions of the age and nation in which they live. And what was the ordinary Jewish conception of the Messiah 2,000 years ago? It can hardly be necessary to remind you. It was no spiritual or moral guide for whom they looked; but a general to lead their armies, and deliver them from the Roman sway—a king, to sit upon the throne of David in Jerusalem, and assert the supremacy of Israel among the nations of the earth. It is inconceivable that John should not have agreed with his contemporaries in the main lines of his conception of the Messiah, though, no doubt, in many particulars his view was higher than theirs. He, too, like the rest, must have hoped for a Christ who should be a temporal ruler.

And if he believed that Jesus was to be such a Christ as this, what a stumbling-block to his faith he must have found in every step of His earthly life. No pomp, no pageant, no display, but a life spent in doing good. No sceptre or crown in the Holy City, but the career of One who was, indeed, a hero with the lower orders of the people, but despised and rejected by their leaders, who strenuously opposed every effort that was put forth to make Him a king.

The very miracles themselves would but add to his perplexity. As long as Jesus worked no miracles he might argue that the day had not come that He

should claim His position as Messiah. But each succeeding miracle could only be a fresh indication that the time was approaching when the claim would be made ; while each succeeding day in the Life of Sorrow it became clearer that no such claim as he thought of would ever be advanced. No wonder, as he considered the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his belief in His Messiahship became less assured.

And then, was not the onslaught of unbelief likely to be rendered all the fiercer by the circumstances of his own life? John heard, we are told, *in the prison* the works of Jesus. He was a captive in the lonely fortress of Machaerus, leading a life of such misery as is difficult for us even to conceive in these days of prison reform. The child of the desert was deprived of his liberty, and cast into a vile dungeon. The great preacher was compelled to be inactive and idle, while another gathered round Him the crowds which had once hung upon *his* words. His only prospect of release was a cruel death at the hands of a licentious king. Was this the reward which God had sent him for his constant witness to the truth, for his bold rebuking of vice? No marvel if, in the agony of his soul, he began to wonder whether that to which he had borne witness was indeed the truth, whether his message was from God at all!

And then he hears of the growing popularity and of the miracles of the young Teacher to whom he had borne such generous testimony. He had laboured, and Jesus of Nazareth was entering into his labours. Be it so. But would this Man, who had power to work such miracles, do nothing for him? If He

were indeed the Christ, would He leave His great forerunner to rot in a loathsome prison-house? Would He search out the sick in Galilee and Judaea, and even among the despised Samaritans, and heal them by the word of His power, while yet He said not one syllable to procure the release of the man sent from God? Can we wonder that the lonely prisoner came to doubt the mission of Jesus; that the question forced itself upon him: Is this Man He that should come; or do we, after all, look for another?

Now, I am well aware that all do not agree in this view of the meaning of the Baptist's message. I know that there are those who say that John's purpose in sending his disciples to Jesus was not to remove his own doubt—for that doubt he had none—but to strengthen the wavering faith of his followers; that he might draw from the lips of the Master some fresh words; that he might induce Him to work some new miracle, in order that *their* belief in His Messiahship might be as strong as his own. I think we may leave the matter to the judgment of any simple and unbiassed reader of the Gospel story. I cannot believe that anyone who reads the narrative, with no theory of his own to support, could receive from it any such impression as this. Nothing seems plainer, on the very surface of the story, than that St. John is here brought before us in the character of an honest doubter. The attempts that have been made to explain this fact away are interesting only for this reason, that they indicate to us a tendency of later Christianity quite foreign to the New Testament

teaching. No one could find any difficulty in the statement that St. John had come for a time to lose faith in the claims of Jesus, except upon two suppositions, both of which are opposed to the whole spirit of the Bible. One of these false suppositions is that the great saints are incapable of sinning; the other—which more immediately concerns us—that doubt itself is sin. We are so apt to think that correctness of belief, dogmatic exactness, is the important thing, that we are inclined to forget that the Holy Scriptures constantly teach that men shall be judged, not by their intellect, but by their life; that while rightness of belief has its own value, the most important thing of all is, that a man should do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with his God. The incident which we are this evening considering, in the life of the Baptist, is a protest against any such exaltation of orthodoxy above holiness. It was at the very time when St. John seemed to be losing his faith in Christ, when he was in the most terrible agony of doubt, that the Lord spoke of him words the like of which He spoke of no other man. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" Do you think that, because of his momentary doubt, John is like the reeds on the banks of the Jordan, blown hither and thither by the storm? "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist."*

* Matt. xi. 7, 9, 11.

St. John, therefore, is the New Testament example of that which is so marked a feature of our own time, doubt as to the great truths of religion. And in an age when so many are haunted by difficulties of belief, speaking to a congregation some of whom are perhaps even now passing through the fiery trial, it cannot be altogether without profit if I glance more closely at the history of the scepticism of the forerunner of Christ.

Two things strike us at once as worthy of attention in the narrative. *First*, the way in which John himself dealt with his own tendency to unbelief; *secondly*, the way in which the Lord dealt with it.

First, then, notice the action of John. He was thrown into perplexity by the seeming indications that Jesus, whom he had preached, was not the Christ. Note now how he proceeds. He sends two of his disciples to this very Jesus, of whose Messiahship he doubted, bidding them to put to Him directly the very question which he himself was unable to answer: Art thou, or art thou not, the Christ? Now, is it not clear what all this implies as to the state of St. John's mind and heart? In the first place, he was in no mood to trifle with his own scepticism. He was willing to take trouble to obtain the solution of his difficulties. Again, he looked his scepticism straight in the face. He did not do what I fear only too many do among ourselves: he did not hide his unbelief from himself; he did not persuade himself that he believed that which in his heart of hearts he did not believe, and then mistake this process of self-deception for faith. And, once more, the sending of

this message to Jesus Christ implies that at the bottom of his doubt there was real and true belief. Why else did he ask Jesus whether He were the Christ? It could only have been because, whatever became of the Messiahship of the Teacher, at least of His absolute rectitude and truthfulness he had no doubt whatever. He knew that Jesus would answer his question truly; that if He were not the Messiah, He would not claim to be the Messiah. Upon the answer, therefore, which Jesus gave to his inquiry his faith must stand or fall.

Brethren, if any of us are tempted to doubt the teachings of Christianity, let us follow the Baptist's example. Let us probe our own scepticism. Let us see exactly in what it consists, and how far it reaches. And be assured of this: if we be real doubters, and not mere cavillers, we shall find beyond all our doubts a residuum of faith—some region into which we feel that doubt cannot enter; a something to which we earnestly cling, and of which we feel that nothing can deprive us. Let us, when we have found it, take our stand upon *that*, and if only we are true to what we do believe, God will guide us through all difficulties; He will enable us to receive so much of His truth as He sees we need to know.

Perhaps an example will make my meaning clearer. Take a question analogous to that which perplexed St. John. The Christian Church has always taught her children that Jesus Christ is God. And yet, many have felt, and naturally felt, difficulty in receiving a doctrine so wonderful, so overwhelming. What, then, are they to do? Are they to minimise the

meaning of the Church's teaching? Are they to deceive themselves into thinking that they believe in the Divinity of Christ when in deed and in truth they do not? Are they to conclude that because the teaching is not obviously true, it may, therefore, be laid aside as of no importance? None of these things. Let them rather go back, and see to what extent they *can* accept the Catholic Faith. Probably all will agree in this: that Jesus was a Man of perfect holiness, of absolute humility, of transparent honesty. Lay firm hold of that truth. Read the Gospel in the light of it; and in due time God will show you, if He sees fit to do so, that the very goodness of Jesus as Man implies that He is more than Man—that He is God.

But again, we have to notice the way in which Jesus Christ dealt with the scepticism of His servant. Very differently, I think, from what we should have expected. We should perhaps have thought that some new and convincing testimony would have been given to the Baptist in this hour of darkness and despair. But no. The disciples put their question, and here is the answer which they were bidden to carry back: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." But, you will say, must not John have known all this before? We are expressly told that he did. Nay, the hearing of these very things may have been part of the ground of his unbelief; they were, at least, the immediate

cause of his message to Jesus: "Now, when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples." How, then, could a reference to these very works help the doubter? Was it not cruel irony to send him back once more to evidence which had already failed to convince him that Jesus was what He claimed to be?

Perhaps not. It may sometimes help us much, when our faith becomes clouded over with difficulties, to be reminded of the foundation on which faith once rested. The answer which Jesus returned to John would seem to have been of this kind: John once recognised Me as Messiah, He would say, on the ground of these very miracles; remind him of them again. True, much in my life is hard to reconcile with what he had been led to expect in the Messiah. My life of humiliation and toil ill suits the character of an earthly sovereign and a victorious general. But what of that? The proofs of my Messiahship are still there. They establish my claim to be the Christ whom God promised by His holy prophets, whatever demonstration there may be that I am not the Christ whom John looked for. John had first formed his theory of what the life of the Messiah should be, and then he doubted the Messiahship of Jesus because His life did not suit the theory. The Saviour would remind him that his course should have been the exact contrary. The miracles were sufficient proof that Jesus was the Christ. When this fact was once established, the nature of the Kingdom of the Christ must be learned, not from theories previously conceived, but from a study of the life of Jesus Himself.

John's case, brethren, is not the only one in which opinions held by one sect or one party, or inferences drawn from what God has revealed to us, have been mistaken for the Faith itself. How often do we find men rejecting the truths which have been entrusted to the Church of Christ, because their reason revolts against the form in which these truths are popularly taught! In all such cases there is but one remedy. We must go back to the foundation. We must consider what the evidence really does prove. What matter if we must cast aside a treasured theory! Is it not better for us to lose a traditional belief, though sanctioned by the holiest and greatest names, than to surrender all our hold upon the Christian Faith?

Once again I shall illustrate what I have said by an example from the controversies of our own time. It is one which exercises, more than perhaps any other, the minds of thoughtful Christians. It is the question of the inspiration of the Bible. All of us, I dare say, have been taught in childhood to believe, as an article of the Faith, in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. And our belief in this verity has led us to suppose that every word, every syllable, every letter of the Bible has been dictated by the Holy Spirit of God. We think, therefore, that every detail of historical or scientific statement in the Bible must be absolutely accurate, every number, every date faultlessly correct. With some such notion as this our earliest religious associations, our earliest thoughts of higher things, are connected. But as we grow older, as our knowledge of men and of things increases, we

gradually discover that such a view of the Bible cannot be maintained. What a shock we have experienced when this persuasion has taken hold of us! We feel for the time that we have lost all. We feel that our faith in the Bible as the Book of God is gone; that with our disbelief in its inspiration, our very faith in Christianity itself is in danger of being destroyed.

What are we to do? Are we to say at once that the Bible is not inspired, because, for example, St. Paul makes a slip when he alludes to the process of grafting olive trees?* Surely not. We must do as Christ bid St. John do. We must look back to the foundation of our faith. We must ask ourselves why we believe the Bible to be inspired; and when once we have satisfied ourselves that it *is* inspired, we must read the Book itself in order to discover what exactly its inspiration means, and what it involves. The inspiration of the Bible is to be judged, not by our preconceived theories of what the Bible ought to be, but by what the evidence tells us the Bible is, by what the Bible itself claims to be.

These, then, in brief, are the two great lessons which seem to be taught us by the incident of the Baptist's life which we have been considering together. When we are depressed and harassed by difficulties of belief, let us do as John did. Let us set definitely before us exactly what our difficulty is, and, after allowing for all doubt and disbelief, how much

* Rom. xi. 17.

of real genuine belief is left behind. Let us cling to that, leaving the rest to God.

And then, again, let us not confound traditional belief with the Faith of the Church of Christ. Let us not imagine that because much of what good people usually believe is disproved, the Faith itself is destroyed.

But I know that many of those who listen to me this evening have never felt the agony of doubt; have never experienced scepticism with regard to the Christian hope. I must not stop without reminding them that they, too, may learn something from the story before us. If you are strong in the faith, do not despise them that are weak. Those whose belief is strong, as well as those who are distressed with doubt, will do well to remember how tenderly, how lovingly Jesus dealt with John. No word of reproach escaped His lips. It was of a doubter and a sceptic that the Master said, "Of them that are born of women a greater hath not arisen than John the Baptist."

XX.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES.*

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith." —HEB. xii. 1, 2.

"THE race that is set before us." So the writer of this Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Christian life. To those who have read ever so little the letters of St. Paul, it is no new figure. Again and again the great Apostle regards our life here as an intense, continuous struggle. Again and again he compares it to those athletic contests which were so striking a feature of the age in which he lived. The Christian is the boxer beating his body black and blue ;† he is the herald of the games, dreading lest when he had acted as herald to others, he himself should be disallowed ;‡ he is the wrestler, wrestling not against flesh and blood, but against the angelic hosts of darkness.§ But, above all, he runs a race. "Know ye not," he says, "that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may

* Edinburgh Cathedral, All Saints' Day, 1896.

† 1 Cor. ix. 27 (compare R. V.). ‡ Ib. § Eph. vi. 12.

obtain." * And as he exhorted the Corinthians to live, so he himself lived as their example. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly." † "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." ‡ And when his life and work are nearly over, when at Rome he awaits the call which is to summon him home to his Lord, it is still as a race that he conceives the past: "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." §

And now, once again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find the familiar image of the race. Is it not one of the many marks that the controversy whether St. Paul wrote this letter has no real importance for the ordinary reader of the Bible? It may be regarded as almost certain that it did not come from his pen; but it is quite as certain that it was composed by his disciple, or his friend. It is permeated by his spirit. It may be read as a message from him, for though he was not its author, yet through it he speaks to us.

Let us look a little more closely at this truly Pauline passage which speaks of the life-race of the Christian. Every word of it is important. Almost every word of it is obscured in our English rendering.

Before the mind's eye of the writer appear three things—three things merged together in actual life,

* 1 Cor. ix. 24. † 1 Cor. ix. 26.
‡ Phil. iii. 13, 14. § 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

but in the figure distinct. First he sees the runner in his long preparation for the race; then he sees him in the arena just before the contest begins; and, lastly, he contemplates him in the midst of the struggle.

It was no light thing to enter as a competitor in those world-renowned games, the lists of which were open to every civilized nation. The man who would excel in them—nay, the man who would not cover himself with ridicule in the contest—must be in perfect training. Weeks and months before the day fixed, those who were to present themselves were straining every nerve in their preparatory exercises. Every muscle must be strengthened and hardened; the physique of the competitors must be developed by constant practice; a rule of life must be for the time adopted, by which all superfluous flesh may be got rid of. "Every weight," as the writer says, must be laid aside—every weight, that is, of flesh which does not minister to health and strength. In a word, the body must be prepared by incessant exercise. "Every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate—self-restraining, living under rule—in all things."*

These athletes in their preliminary training are an example to us Christians. They had a race to run; so have we. The race won gained for them a fading garland, a passing honour; for us it gains an imperishable crown, eternal glory. As they trained for their race, so must we for ours. As they exercised the body, so must we exercise the soul. Our life,

* 1 Cor. ix. 25.

like theirs, must be lived by rule. We must deny ourselves every pleasure, every enjoyment of life, however innocent in itself, which would unfit us for putting forth all our power in the great business for which God has placed us here, in running the race that is set before us.

But now the runners are on the ground. Their preparation is not over even yet. Those long flowing robes which form their ordinary attire, how can they run in them? They will impede their course at every step. And so they must be laid aside. The competitors put off their outer garments.

This, too, has its counterpart in the arena of the spiritual life. We Christians have that which we must put off from us if we will run aright the race that is set before us. "Laying aside," says our text, "the sin which doth so easily beset us," or, as it should be rendered, "the sin with which we are begirt, which wraps us round like a garment." For the apostolic writer is not thinking of what we usually describe as "besetting sins." We adopt the phrase of the text, and we use it to denote a very real fact, of which every one of us has daily experience in his life—those special sins into which more than any other we are liable to fall; the special weakness, the one great bitterness which each one knows in his own heart. But the words of the text have a different meaning. They picture sin as something which twines about us, enwraps and envelops us, hinders our heavenward course, trips us up at every step. The first essential of the Christian life is that this outer garment of sin must be cast away.

But all preparation is at length over: the runners have assembled at the starting-point; soon they will have entered upon the course. How, then, are they to run in order that they may be successful, in order that the chaplet of victory may be theirs? "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." With patience. And what, we may well ask, has *patience* to do with an athletic contest? Little indeed. Patience is a thing which has its place far more in suffering than in acting. We can be patient in affliction when we receive it meekly, knowing that it comes from God. We may be patient in sickness, or in sorrow, or in privation or want, if we do not repine against it, or fret at the chastening of the Lord. But patience in active work, patience in the race of life; this has little meaning, little force. But put for "patience" another phrase which comes nearer to the sense of the original Greek, and the lesson of our text at once becomes plain. The word here rendered "patience" signifies constant, steady, unwavering perseverance. "Let us run with constant perseverance the race that is set before us." That is, indeed, the way in which a race *must* be run, if the runner is to overpass his fellows. No useless display, no wasting of strength in spasmodic efforts, but constant, steady, untiring exertion from end to end of the course. It is a very image of what the Christian life ought to be; and yet how many of us must own with sorrow that it is, after all, a picture of what our lives are not! We have our enthusiasms for God and for right; and well it is that we have them. Poor and miserable is the life which has no enthusiasm. But how often our out-

bursts of enthusiasm die away in the dull, monotonous round of ordinary life! How quickly at times does the warmth of our zeal cool in the chilly atmosphere of daily duty! Has not every one of us found himself again and again weary in well-doing? And yet the exhortation is to run the race with patience, with constant effort; with enthusiasm indeed, but with an enthusiasm which never leaves us; with zeal, but with a zeal which goes with us when the way seems long and the progress is slow.

Thus by the image of the race our text shows us the nature of the Christian life. It has its training in self-denial and self-restraint; it has its preparation in the casting aside of the cloak of sin; it has its course in the unwearied effort to do our duty. In one respect, indeed, the metaphor fails. The contest is more difficult than the picture seems to suggest. For our training, our preparation, our course, are not three successive acts: all three are ever present. Every day, every hour, we must be crushing down self; we must be repenting of our sins; we must be striving to do the will of God. It is an awful struggle. And the very surest sign that a man does not know what the Christian life means is that he has not realised the intensity and awfulness of the struggle which it involves.

Such is the life which as Christians we have to live. We surely need some encouragement if we are to go through with it. Where are we to find this encouragement, this inspiration? If we would know, let us return once more to the simile of the text. That young Grecian athlete, whence does *he* derive

his inspiration, as he goes on and on round the weary course till he wins his race? What is it which nerves him to do then and there what, at another time and in another place, he could not do? What is it which gives him courage and hope, which makes it impossible for him to yield till the course is finished and the goal is passed?

Surely it is the tier upon tier of spectators whom he sees around him. Surely it is the thousands of onlookers, whose interest in the race is as great as his own. He knows that there is many a one sitting there who has taken his part in the contest in years gone by, many a friend who is eager for his success. It is their cries of approval, when he has run well, which make him run better; it is the hope of their applause, when the race is over, that nerves him to put forth all his strength, and to contend, with ever-increasing earnestness, that the winner's garland may be his.

Is there nothing similar to this in the Christian race? In very truth, there is. It is the very central motive of the writer of our text to assure us that there is. "Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"—seeing that we contend in the presence of a host of spectators, who long for our victory, who will applaud our success, who grieve over our every failure—"seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Who these witnesses were, he left his readers in no doubt. He had been telling of the heroes of their nation and of their Church, who by

faith had obtained a good report—of Abel, and Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses, and all the rest, who had nobly run the race in the ages that were past. These are the spectators, he says, the witnesses of the conflict. In their presence the race is run. They know the difficulties of the struggle, for they have been in the midst of it themselves. They are all around you, eager and earnest for your triumph. Let this thought cheer you in the long and weary race of life.

It is a thought, brethren, which we shall do well to press home upon our hearts on this great Festival of All Saints. It is the last of the Saints' Days in our Calendar. One after another we have commemorated Virgin, Apostle, Evangelist, Martyr, Prophet. And now we bring together into one the lessons which these commemorations have taught us. We think of the Virgin Mother, of Paul, and Peter, and John, and all the holy band, assembled together in that home, where we shall be with them when the painful warfare of this life is past. But let us not think of them as separated from us till that day comes. They are not. They are the crowds which encircle the race-course. We see not them; but they see us. They watch anxiously for our progress and our triumph; they sympathize with our sorrows and our failures; they pray for us (why should we doubt it?) when our efforts flag and our zeal abates.

May we not go a step further? Surely, under the name of All Saints, we include not only those whose names are written in the page of history, or enshrined in the Calendar of the Church. To-day we remember

that among those who gaze upon us now is many a one whose life of holiness and purity, of love and faith was lived unknown and unheeded, whose name is written nowhere but in the Lamb's Book of Life. Yes, that cloud of witnesses which encompasses our path is a vast, an unnumbered company, the good and true, as well as the great, of every age. Among them, perchance, are not a few who have, for some part of the way, run the race beside us. Is it not at least worth while to know that *they* have not forgotten us? Those from whose lives you learned so much; those who gave you help, and cheer, and counsel in dark and trying times; those to whom you were bound by ties of love here on earth; those whom, with bleeding hearts, you laid to rest—they are the Saints of God who are in our thoughts to-day. They can pierce the veil which hides them from you. They see your struggles, and wait to cheer you at the end, when the race is won, and you take your places with them on the benches of the spectators.

And then, lastly, there is One the thought of Whom must fill our minds, even when we remember with Him His blessed dead—Jesus Christ, the King of Saints. He, too, is a spectator of the race. He, too, toiled along the course, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."* And now He stands "the Author and Perfecter of our faith," encouraging, helping, guiding us in the struggle. Would not all the weariness, all the painfulness, leave the contest, if we could but realise that

* *V.* 2.

He is still by our side as we run ; that there is laid up for us the crown that fadeth not away, which He Himself, the righteous Judge, shall give us in that day : if we could but run, looking ever unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith ?

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